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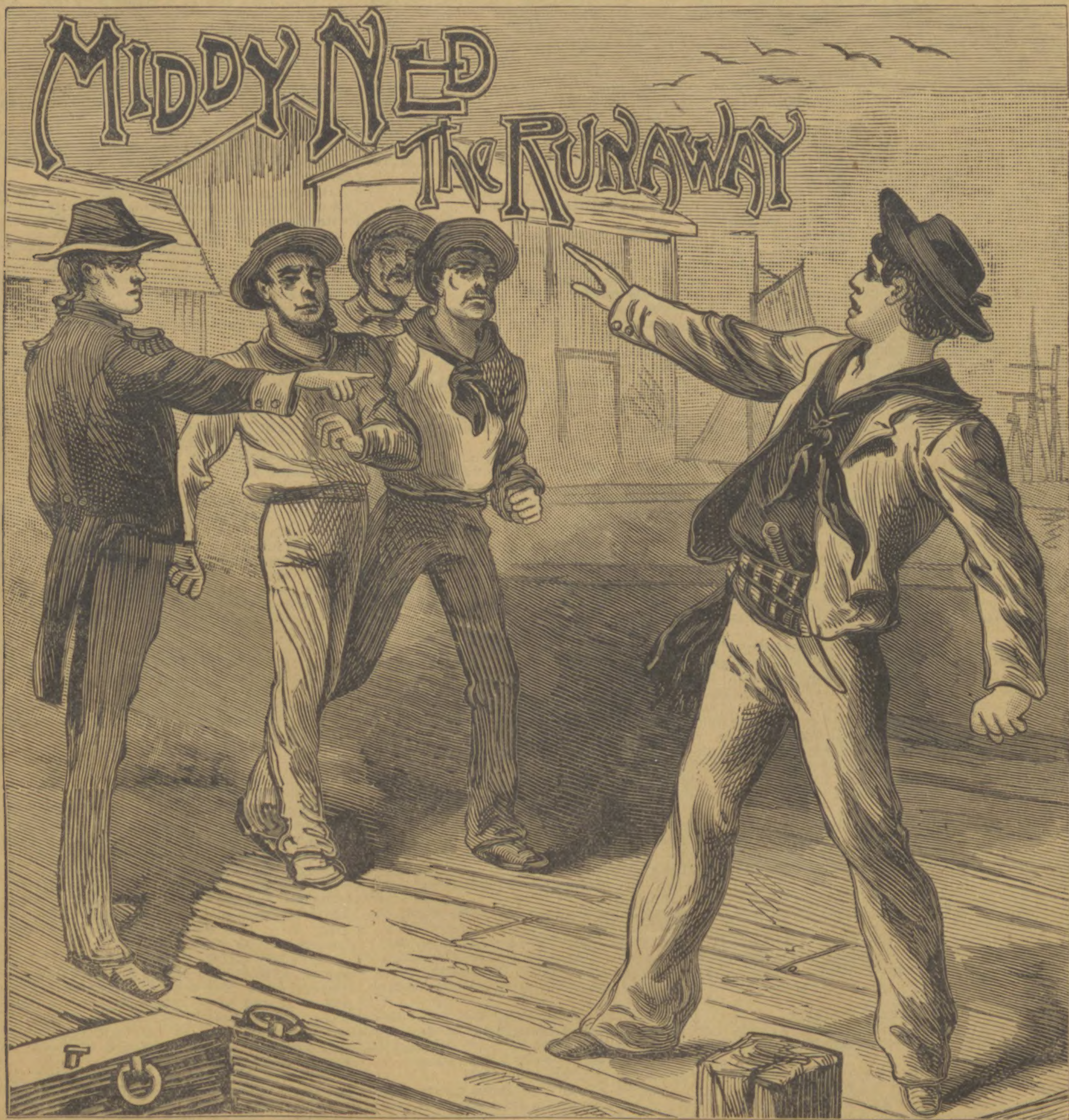
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"SEIZE THAT YOUNG CHAP AND CLAP HIM IN IRONS"

Middy Ned, the Runaway;

OR,

Hairbreadth Escapes Afloat and Ashore.

The Story of the Great Commodore's First Year at Sea.

BY T. J. FLANAGAN,

AUTHOR OF "THE TWO MIDSHIPMEN," "MIDSHIPMAN DARE," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE FUTURE COMMODORE AS A RUNAWAY.

"I'm through with this kind of work!"

"Hold on, Ned! Where are you going?"

"Anywhere—to get away from digging potatoes," and the speaker walked away, leaving the field in which, with his six brothers, he had over an hour been digging potatoes.

The first speaker was Edward Preble—then a boy of sixteen, and afterward the celebrated commodore—and the other an elder brother.

Their short conversation took place in a potato field outside the town of Falmouth (now Portland), Maine, to which General Preble—better known as "The Brigadier," on account of having risen to the rank of brigadier-general in his native colony of Massachusetts—had removed during the year made memorable by the Declaration of Independence.

At the outbreak of the Revolution, "The Brigadier" was seventy years of age, and as, in that day and region, laborers were not to be had for the asking (so many of the young men of the country being absent in the army, or on private armed vessels of war), General Preble was often compelled to take the field, at the head of his sons, in a capacity less martial than had distinguished his previous enterprises. On a pressing occasion, he ordered all his boys to take their hoes, go to the proper place, and begin digging potatoes. Young Edward did his part of the work for an hour or two, and then suddenly threw down his hoe, exclaiming:

"I'm through with this kind of work!"

He left the field, and, while his brothers were calculating what would be the consequences of the next meeting between The Brigadier and Ned, the latter was making the best of his way toward what was left of Falmouth, which, like other Eastern seaports, had been ruthlessly fired by the British at the beginning of the Revolution.

Ned had stopped work just before noon, and long ere he reached the town felt very hungry; but there was no way of appeasing that want until Falmouth was reached, and, as pursuit was probable, he trudged along.

Half a mile from the town, Ned came across an old woman who implored his assistance in crossing a rough piece of the road. The young runaway not only did this, but, forgetting all about his haste, accompanied the old woman to the town, and, on the way, learned her story.

She was a widow, with one son in the army, and another at sea. These sons had left their mother quite comfortable in Falmouth, but, when that town was destroyed, the widow's house was first to suffer.

"And now," she concluded, "I don't know what to do. I've been stayin' with my sister-in-law until to-day, but her husband's a hard man, and would keep me no longer, though I was willin' t' work, 'n' did work hard, too."

"Have you no friends?" asked the runaway lad.

"I don't know, but I'm goin' to ask a neighbor t' let me stay till my son's ship comes back. Ten miles I've walked this blessed day to get to her, and not a morsel have I eaten since last night."

Ned had just one shilling in his pocket—his total capital, but the old woman's story touched the boy's heart.

"Here, madam, is a shilling," he said, drawing forth his treasure, "and there is a very good inn where you can get something to eat."

"May Heaven bless you!" exclaimed the mother, tears in her eyes.

Ned hurried away to escape her thanks.

"She wanted it worse than you did," he said to the protesting stomach, and bent his footsteps toward the shipping.

Several vessels were in port on which the lad sought employment, but his age was against him, and evening found him wandering back past the inn, supperless and moneyless.

"Better luck to-morrow," he thought. "I can sleep in some barn, and if that poor old lady could go for twenty-four hours without eating, I'm sure I can," as he had to do, and would have gladly endured a whole day of potato-digging for a good breakfast, the next morning, after passing the night on the hay-mow of a barn.

Ned had hardly left the barn in which he "lodged," when he met the owner, who looked at him in surprise, saying:

"Good-morning, Master Preble! You're out pretty early, to-day!"

As it was just about sunrise, Ned was compelled to admit that he was out "pretty early."

The farmer, never dreaming that the boy was a runaway, went on to the barn, leaving Ned—feeling angry and miserable—to resume his way to a stream a half-mile away, for a wash-up and drink.

"Now I must get away from here," he said; "that fellow will be sure to say he saw me."

After a good drink and a face-and-hands bath, Ned returned to Falmouth, and finally, near noon, climbed aboard a beautiful, armed schooner, and asked if a boy was wanted.

"Dunno, sah. Cap'n 'n' mos' all de rest gone onshore," replied the cook, whom Ned met coming out of the galley.

"Dar's de bosun; mebbe he tell you," added the cook, as a tall, thin man, with a long black beard, and sad, black eyes, came toward the vessel, which was named the *Volunteer*.

"Want a boy?" echoed the boatswain on coming aboard. "Well, I dunno but we do. But you're pretty young!" looking sharply at the lad.

"Over fourteen, sir!" promptly spoken.

"Hum! Well, ye kin wait 'round till the captain comes."

CHAPTER II.

SKIPPED.

DELIGHTED at even the hope of shipping, Ned Preble the future commander sat down on a coil of rope, just as the schooner's bell was rung eight strokes, and he asked:

"What is that for, sir?"

"Eight bells, my boy, which means twelve o'clock, and dinner-time, too."

"Dinner-time!" repeated Ned, looking wistfully toward the galley, from which most savory odors were issuing.

The boatswain caught the look and tone, and partly guessing the rest, said:

"Ay, my lad, dinner-time, and glad am I of it. What d'ye say to takin' a bite. Let's see what Scip's got for us."

And see he did—the hungriest boy in town! Pea soup and corned beef—or "salt horse," as sailors term it—with potatoes and crackers, composed the meal to which the half-starved Ned was ushered.

"Looks as if ye were a little hungry," observed the boatswain, smiling at the ravenous manner in which the boy devoured the food placed before him.

Ned colored deeply, and in explanation was forced to confess that he had not tasted food for thirty-six hours.

"Ph-e-w! Runaway from home!" His chances of employment would be very slim if he told the truth; that he knew; but scorned to lie, he told his story.

"It's a poor sailor that goes on a cruise without stores," commented the boatswain; "why didn't ye bring somethin' with ye?"

"Because I didn't expect to have much trouble in shipping, and I had a shilling when I started, but—"

"Well, what did ye with the shillin'?" demanded the boatswain, looking curiously at Ned.

"I gave it to a poor old lady; she wanted it more than I did; she was starving."

"That was yesterday afternoon, near the inn at the edge of the town?" asked the sailor, strangely excited.

"Yes;—did you meet her?" asked the much-surprised lad.

Springing up, and seizing Ned's hand, the boatswain replied:

"Yes, thank God, I did meet her! It was my own dear old mother ye helped, my lad, an' while Tom Turner's got a shot in the locker you'll never go hungry ag'in—nor want a friend!"

Then, before the astonished boy could speak, the grateful seaman plunged one hand into his pocket, and withdrawing it full of gold and silver, which he laid before Ned, continued:

"There, my lad, help yourself!"

"I'd rather not, sir," protested the runaway; "but I would like you to get me on this vessel."

"We'll talk about that," returned the boat-

swain, selecting several pieces of gold from the heap, "we'll talk about that, my lad; but first, take these! You'll need them for your kit, if ye do ship, an' you must keep them for your kindness if ye don't ship."

Paying no attention to Ned's protest, the boatswain told him on arriving at Falmouth, he found his mother's cottage destroyed, his mother missing, and no one, apparently, certain whether she was dead or alive, and not until the previous day had her son got traces of her.

That day, however, he met a friend who suggested that Mrs. Turner might have taken refuge with her sister-in-law, so the sailor started at once for the latter's farm. On the outskirts of the town was an inn, at which he stopped for a "bite"—bread and cheese and ale—and met his mother!

"Only for you, my boy, she'd never have got there," declared the boatswain.

"And now about your shippin'," continued Turner. "You've done me a great service, and it don't seem the best way to repay ye to inter-juice ye t' a life that's hard at its best, but particularly aboard this craft. D'ye know she's a letter-o' marque?"

"What's that, sir?"

"Well, it's a kind of a commission from this Government, t' do t'other one all the harm ye can. There's money in it—sometimes, and danger at all times, so you'd better wait a bit, and see what your father will do for ye."

"If I can't go with you, I will with some one else," said Ned, determinedly; "I'll not go back to the farm, so I do wish you would help me to get here."

"Well, I'll talk t' the captain; but if he says you're too young, I hope you'll promise t' go home, an' not try any cruise—just yet, anyhow."

It so happened that the captain, (who came aboard while they were talking,) was acquainted with the brigadier, but bore no good will toward him, and when the boatswain spoke of Ned, he thought it an excellent way to pay off old scores with the father, by shipping the son.

"Preble!" he exclaimed, "why, yes, I guess we can make use of that boy. Send him here."

"Captain wants t' talk t' ye, Ned," said Turner going forward to where the boy was waiting.

The captain laughed heartily on hearing the story of the potato digging, told Ned he was a fine, spirited lad, and the runaway was engaged as cabin-boy.

"We sail to-morrow," announced the captain, "and when you write your father—as, of course, you will, and I will see to the delivery of the letter—be sure to tell him your captain's name is Bill Brown. Don't forget it's Bill—not William."

That night, under the supervision of the watchful boatswain, Ned purchased an outfit, and on his return to the *Volunteer* wrote a letter to his father, informing him of his good fortune in having secured a berth with Captain Bill Brown.

This letter, which was intrusted to the captain, was delivered next evening while the Preble family were at supper, and The Brigadier read it aloud.

Except Mrs. Preble, who burst into tears, and cried: "Oh, Edward, how could you leave me?" none of the family dared make any comment until after The Brigadier spoke.

"There's no use crying," he said; "one voyage with that pirate will cure Ned of his love for the sea—that is; if he ever gets home again!"

CHAPTER III.

OUT OF THE FRYINGPAN.

HAVING got rid of his letter, Ned's first thought was to get acquainted with his shipmates, and leaving the cabin, where the captain had allowed, or rather ordered, him to write, he sought the boatswain in the fore-castle.

The *Volunteer* carried ten guns, and forty men, and Ned found most of the latter sitting and lying around Tom Turner, speculating, as usual, as to their destination, and the probable financial results of the cruise.

"D'ye know, Tom, I've an idee she's goin' out as a slaver this time," one of the crew was saying, but, when Ned made his appearance, stopped short, and gazed inquiringly at the boatswain, while the others stared at the stranger.

"Come here, Ned, my lad," said Turner, and making room for the boy beside him, put his hand protectingly on his shoulder.

That was sufficient for the others, but the boatswain wished to settle all doubts, and said:

"Heave ahead, Dick—I'm answerable for this youngster. Ye all know how I looked, and

looked, for my poor, old mother—well, this is the lad that gave up his last shillin' t' her, and that put me in the way o' findin' her."

After that, no one commanded more respect and good will in the fore-castle than Edward Preble, and a fine-looking, well-built youth of sixteen, who was sitting at the boatswain's feet, with his head resting against the latter's knee, turned and took a look—long and deliberate—at our young adventurer, after which he shook hands with him.

"Well, as I was sayin', I've an idee she's goin' out as a slaver," resumed Dick. "The cargo that he's put aboard—printed cottons 'n' hardware 'n' irons for legs 'n' arms—don't look like the last cruise."

"That's right enough, Dick," returned Turner, "but I know we go to France first, 'n' it's likely the prints 'n' hardware are for there. As for the irons, ye all know how it was when them chaps escaped six months ago."

There was a general murmur, in response to the boatswain's last words, and he continued:

"To-morrow's a long day, boys—powder 'n' shot, ye know—an' for one, I'm goin' t' turn in."

The men, following Turner's example, arose and retired to their bunks, and after being introduced to Frank Horton, the youth who had shaken hands with him, and whose successor he was, Ned did the same.

Next day was a busy one for all hands, and when everything was stowed, and the order was given to "man the windlass!" Ned breathed a sigh of relief.

The clattering of handspikes preceded the sailor's song. Then came the heavy labor by which the anchor was lifted from the bottom, and, in a few more minutes, the ship was released from her hold upon the land.

The wind came fresh off the ocean, charged with the saline dampness of the element. As the air fell upon the distended and balanced sails, the Volunteer bowed to the welcome guest; and then, rising gracefully from its low inclination, the breeze, that music so grateful to a seaman's ear, was heard singing through the rigging. Ere ten minutes had gone by, the lighter sails were set, the courses had fallen, and the Volunteer's bows were throwing the spray before her.

Ned enjoyed all this very much, but before night he began to feel very queer; then very sick, and finally, was helped below by Turner, was put in his hammock, where he remained in a gale of wind of three days' duration, bewildered, confused, puzzled, and every minute knocking his head against the beams, with the pitching and tossing of the schooner.

"And this is going to sea," thought Ned; "no wonder father was opposed—warned me against it."

The gale abated on the evening of the third day, the next morning the sea was nearly down, and there was but a slight breeze on the waters.

The comparative quiet of the night before had very much recovered Ned, and when the hammocks were piped down, he dressed himself and went on deck.

"Hello! All right again?" asked Horton.

"Yes—has Captain Brown been wanting me?"

"Captain Brown? Who the deuce is Captain Brown?" asked Horton, looking very much surprised.

"Why, isn't that the captain's name?" counter-questioned Ned, equally surprised.

"No—the captain's name is Kiddle. The only Captain Brown I ever heard of is a regular pirate. How did you get that name into your head?"

In reply Ned told how he had come to ship on the Volunteer, and the captain's instructions regarding the letter to The Brigadier.

"It was only a joke," declared Horton, and then proceeded to instruct Ned as to his duties, which were anything but heavy, until the schooner entered the Bay of Biscay.

Then Kiddle began drinking heavily, and Ned suffered as well as the rest, for nothing could be done to the satisfaction of the captain, who was a demon when under the influence of liquor.

When within one day's sail of Bordeaux, a squall struck the schooner, bringing the half-drunken captain on deck, and the first person he met was Ned, who had hitherto escaped the kicks and blows, now so freely distributed among the crew.

"What are you doing here? Why aren't you at work?" demanded the captain, seeing the first officer had the vessel in proper trim, and having no one else to find fault with.

"You told me to clear out—to go on deck a half-hour ago," replied Ned.

"Ye lie!" roared the captain, catching the boy by the shoulder and shaking him. "Ye lie, I say! Don't ye lie?"

"No, sir, I don't lie!" exclaimed Ned, wrenching himself free, and at the same moment a sudden lurch of the vessel threw the captain on his back, where he lay yelling and cursing, until Turner helped him to his feet.

"Where's that young scoundrel?" he demanded, as soon as he was standing up, and catching sight of Ned, who was some distance away, ordered him to come aft, at the same time threatening to break every bone in his body.

As Ned had no desire to put himself into the brute's hands, he remained where he was, and, warned by the recent fall that he could not cross the slippery decks, the captain ordered the men to "seize that young imp and clap him in irons," but—

Not a man stirred to obey the order!

CHAPTER IV.

ESCAPED.

"HA! Mutiny would ye!" cried the captain, and pulling a pistol from his pocket, lurched forward, calling upon the men by name to seize Ned.

Even the latter saw that this was done to bring matters to a head—that refusal by the men would be met by at least one pistol-shot from the captain, and for a moment every man of the crew was ripe for mutiny. They were tired of the captain's brutality, and now that it meant murder, all that was needed was a leader.

Ned, however, put an end to the incipient mutiny, by saying to one of the men ordered to put him in irons:

"Take me down, Silas; I don't mind it a bit."

The man addressed laid his hand on Ned's arm, and, followed by the other threatened man, the three went below, where the boy was left in the forehold—but not in irons.

That evening the Volunteer made the mouth of the Garonne, and anchored off-shore for the night.

Ned had had several visitors during the afternoon, and one of them, Frank Horton, after reporting the captain as drinking himself into a drunken stupor, said:

"Ned, I'm tired of this, and I guess you are, too. What do you say to taking French leave?"

"Run away?"

"Yes, I can't stand that brute any longer;—we will not talk about it now. To-night, when I come off watch, we'll arrange how to get away."

At one bell in the middle watch (8:30 P. M.) Horton came below, looking somewhat excited.

"We've got to get away to-night or not at all," he said, on entering the hold. "Turner heard the captain, before he got too drunk to talk, tell Bruce [the first officer] to have the gig ready to go ashore to-morrow morning, and that as soon as he returned, we would set sail again—where to, nobody knows, but more than likely, for the Gold Coast, because the people he's going to see are agents for coffee, sugar and other planters, who need slaves all the time."

"Well, I'm ready, but I can't swim very far, Frank."

"Swim? Who's talking about swimming? You steal into the fo'k'sle in a few minutes, and make up a bundle of your best duds. Then about seven bells (11:30) come on deck, and we'll put off in the dingy."

"That's all right, Frank, but what about my being seen in the fore-castle, not to speak of on deck?"

"You needn't be afraid of being seen in the fo'k'sle; the men won't say anything about it. As for being seen on deck, Turner will look out for that part. He's officer of the middle watch, in place of Bruce, who is sick."

"Oh, if that's the case, I'll begin now," said Ned, and his friend offering no objection, he entered the fore-castle, where, as predicted, no one seemed to notice anything strange about his appearance, although the conversation changed almost immediately to Bordeaux, and the best hiding places for runaway sailors in that town.

Ned quickly perceived that this talk was for his benefit, and paid strict attention to the names, prices and places mentioned, until the men sought their hammocks. He then made up a small bundle of articles deemed most necessary and at seven bells slipped up on deck.

The boatswain was standing on the fore-castle head, his face turned to the sea, and going aft,

Ned, leaning over the taffrail, saw Frank in the small boat, which was directly under the cabin windows.

"Quick!" said Frank, in a low voice, and holding taut the rope by which the boat was secured, for Ned to slide down, which the latter quickly did.

"Sit in the stern," he continued, cutting loose from the schooner, and taking the oars headed for Bordeaux.

After a half hour's stiff rowing, the young adventurers effected a landing, and picking up their bundles started to find one of the hiding places mentioned by the sailor.

In this Frank's knowledge of the French language, which he had picked up from the crew of the Volunteer, proved of great assistance. Indeed, without it, they might have searched all night.

Two or three inquiries, however, and a shilling to a ragged boy of twelve or thirteen, who was their final guide, brought them to Monsieur Pitou's *cafe*—a miserable looking wooden shanty, situated in an even more miserable looking, out of the way alley.

Notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, the boys found the bar well filled with seamen of almost every nationality, and others who were there to assist them in spending their hard earned money.

Entrance had not been obtained without difficulty, but once inside the appearance of his new guests assured Monsieur Pitou of their character, and his first question was how much money they had.

"Don't tell him!" warned a voice from behind the boys, but in so low a tone, that, amid the noise made by the half-drunken sailors sitting round them, it escaped the landlord's notice.

Acting on the hint, Horton displayed a sovereign, saying:

"If you can ship us before that is gone, the balance is yours, and my friend will give you another."

"Now give us something to eat and drink," continued Frank, cutting short further questioning, and turning, as if in search of a place, saw the man who had warned him.

He was a big, muscular-looking fellow, sitting alone, and taking a seat on the opposite side of the table, Frank made an excuse for talking to him by saying:

"Will you join us, shipmate?"

"For the sake o' talkin' t' ye without bein' noticed, I will, my lad, but don't you go squanderin' yer coin on me, or any o' these bloody land-sharks," replied the stranger, and the landlord having brought a small bottle of claret for the boys, and cognac for the man, he continued:

"As soon as you've finished eatin', go to yer room, 'n' if ye like, I'll go up 'n' talk with ye—but, anyhow, don't stop down here."

A waiter now appeared with some cold meat and bread for the three, and, while eating, the stranger, who told them his name was Blood, said:

"This is the first I've had to-day. A week ago I came here with seventy pounds—this mornin' I hadn't tuppence."

"If you've got any coin, keep it t' yerself, or they'll bleed ye as they did me."

"Did you have to run away, too?" innocently asked Ned.

"Yes—from the customs officers," replied Blood, with a grin.

"Smuggling?" asked Frank.

Blood nodded, and the meal being finished, the party retired to a room on the floor above.

CHAPTER V.

INTO THE FIRE.

UP-STAIRS, Frank told the story of their running away, and in return Blood, who had seen all kinds of service, in every quarter of the globe, related the story of his connection with a band of twenty smugglers, who had been surprised two weeks previous by the customs officers. He had escaped by jumping overboard, after all his comrades had been killed or captured.

"Now," said he, "I suppose you're anxious t' get back home, 'n' from the offer ye made that land-shark below, it won't be long afore you'll be shipped. He'll tell ye it's for America, but, just as likely as not, it'll be some other place, because he'll be crazy t' get rid o' ye."

This was anything but a pleasant outlook, and Ned came to the conclusion that running away wasn't such a fine idea after all—it didn't seem to agree with him.

It was all very well to run away and go where you like, but quite another thing to run

away and go where another fellow likes—not to speak of the other fellow being a drunken brute.

"I'm goin' t' ship t'-morrow 'r next day," continued Blood, "but for where I don't know 'n' don't care. My money's all gone, so he got me a ship t' get rid o' me."

After a little further conversation, and much friendly caution, Blood left the young adventurers to take such rest as they might be able to get out of the miserable apology for a bed with which the room was furnished.

But a sailor's life is not one which renders luxurious, or even ordinary, sleeping quarters a necessity, and soon both were sound asleep.

Next morning, the boys were awakened by a loud rapping on the door, and, on opening it, found Blood, with a small bundle under his arm, standing outside, waiting to bid them good-by.

"Be careful, boys; that chap's liable t' do anythin'," were his parting words, and when Ned released the ex-smuggler's hand, he left a sovereign in it—shutting and locking the door to prevent its return.

Ned had taken a great liking to the big, bluff Englishman, and knowing he had no money, and seeing the size of his "kit," had taken this means of expressing his thanks for the friendship shown to Frank and himself.

He could easily afford it, too, for before retiring the previous night, Frank handed him a chamouis-skin bag, fastened like a tobacco-pouch, saying:

"For fear of accident, Ned, you had better take charge of this. It is yours—given me by Tom Turner to give to you with this message:

"If you attempt to return it, or refuse to accept and use it, he will believe that you do so merely because you consider yourself so much above him that you will not accept a favor at his hands."

"And I think you'll be a fool if you refuse it," added Frank.

"I shall accept it—as a loan," returned Ned, who because of the wording of the message, would have done almost anything rather than rest under the imputation of being too proud to do it.

Going down-stairs, the boys found the landlord in great good humor. He had shipped several unwelcome guests, at a good price, that morning, and was ready to get rid of more.

"Ah! Good-morning, gentlemen!" he exclaimed. "I have good news for you, I believe. You can ship to-morrow, if you wish, for your own country. I am anxious, you see to earn the other sovereign."

When this pleasing intelligence was interpreted for Ned's benefit, he impulsively struck the pocket containing the bag, exclaiming:

"Tell the old blood-sucker he can have two if he gets us off to-day."

Monsieur Pitou's small eyes sparkled as he heard the ring of the gold, but he received Frank's explanation of his friend's words:

"We wish to go as soon as possible!" with the most innocent and confiding air imaginable—notwithstanding the fact that Monsieur understood what Ned said fully as well as Frank did!

That day was a long one to the boys, most of it being spent in their room, and it was a relief to be summoned to dine—by special invitation—with the landlord.

"It is your last night," he said; "so, as you have been profitable guests, you shall dine with me."

"I wonder what the land shark, as Blood calls him, is up to?" said Ned, as they sat to a well-filled table.

Frank made no reply—he felt suspicious of this sudden display of liberality, in view of Blood's warnings, and refused to take any of the claret until he saw the host drinking it.

Shortly after the meal was disposed of, both Frank and Ned began to feel a little drowsy, and refusing Monsieur Pitou's repeated invitations to remain below, retired to their room.

It was eight o'clock when they retired, and a few minutes after both were asleep.

It was eight o'clock when they awoke—eight o'clock the following night—and a few minutes after, Ned, who was first to recover his senses, saw the face of Blood bending over him.

"How the deuce do you come to be here?" asked Blood.

Ned stared in stupid surprise. There was something wrong with his head—what he could not imagine, but although it certainly was not clear, he quickly realized that he was not longer in his room at Monsieur Pitou's refuge for runaways—his surroundings and the rolling of the ship told him that much. How he had come

to be aboard ship he did not know, and so informed Blood.

"Well," said the ex-smuggler, "I saw the pair o' ye carried aboard at three bells in the mornin' watch (1:30 A. M.) an' here ye're layin' like logs ever since—drunk, as I thought—an' we've had t' be so careful 'bout gettin' away, that I didn't get a chance t' see if I knowed ye."

"Careful about getting away? Why, what's wrong—whatship is it?" asked Ned, in alarm.

"That's what bothered me when I saw who ye were—I couldn't make out how ye came ship on her; but I see now how it was—that old rascal drugged ye. Is yer money safe?"

No, the heavy purse was gone! but, more anxious about the ship than the money, Ned again asked what ship he was on, and like one forced to tell a disagreeable truth, Blood replied:

"Well, my lad, I tell ye the plain truth—'n' though the crew (like myself) are a pretty rough lot—I don't think any of 'em suspect she's anythin' worse'n a slaver, (which she may be) but I know that her captain, Bill Brown, was a pirate when I ran across him last time."

A pirate! All the wealth of the Indies would not have tempted Ned from that detested potato-digging, if he could again have the choice between that and running away. He listened like one in a dream, while Blood continued:

"Of course, it don't matter 'bout a chap like me, though I never got down t' piracy, but to run the necks of two young chaps, like you, into the halter—I'll wring that old scoundrel's neck for it if ever we get back."

The fierceness of the threat, and the doubt as to their return, startled Ned, and he was not reassured by Frank's quiet comment:

"Out of the fryingpan into the fire!"

Frank had been awake for some time, listening to what was going on, and after uttering the above quoted words, got up and looked about the dimly-lighted fore-castle. There was something familiar about it, and he asked:

"What's the name of this ship?"

"That changes as often as the seasons," replied Blood, "but she left Bordeaux as—By George! It's your old ship, the Volunteer!"

"And the captain?" gasped Ned.

"Is the same captain, whatever name you knowed him by."

The runaways looked at each other in dismay.

"P-e-e-w!" whistled Frank, "now we are in for it."

Ned was past speech, but for the next few minutes he did a great deal of thinking from which he was roused by the hoarse call:

"All hands on deck!"

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE FIRE.

THE runaways were not at all anxious to meet the captain, but they did not dare disobey the summons, so they joined the men who hurried on deck, urged by the boatswain's cry:

"Lively there! Tumble up! Tumble up!"

The call that summoned the men brought the captain on deck, but, as soon as the squall passed, he returned to the cabin, without having noticed either Frank or Ned, among the largely increased crew of the Volunteer.

The squall passed as quickly as it came, and the men returned to the fore-castle, where the appearance of Frank and Ned created much surprise, and some alarm, among those of the old crew who were in the watch below.

"Howsumever, he's off his liquor now," said old Dick, while talking of the runaways' chances of escaping punishment, "an' mebbe he'll forget all about it. He don't gen'rally remember anythin' when he sobers up, but you [Ned] stand the worst chance—'cause why, your station t'-morra mornin' is in the cabin. But ye can't tell nothin' about it—mebbe he'll forget ye entirely, 'n' mebbe he won't."

This was cold comfort for Ned, but the very expression of the boatswain's countenance, when he came below and discovered the runaways, made it worse.

Turner agreed with old Dick, that Ned's only hope lay in acting as if nothing had happened.

"Go right in," he said, "and, if he does remember that you've been away, why, just swear that he gev ye liberty ashore, an' we'll back ye up."

But this Ned refused to do. As cabin-boy, midshipman, lieutenant, commander and commodore, the most striking trait of his character was his undaunted courage—more so even than his temper—and he would not lie to save himself from the captain's vengeance.

"You're nothin' better'n a fool!" exclaimed old Dick, when Ned declared his intention of telling the truth if questioned.

"I don't care—he can't do more than kill me!" was the dogged reply.

There was little sleep for the future commodore that night. Pictures of the grating and cat-o'-nine-tails floated before the eyes of his imagination, and, when he did doze off, his sleep was troubled by horrible dreams of the captain and a "cat," compared to which the sword of Damocles was as nothing.

Next morning, however, Ned resumed his duties in the cabin without any remarks being passed on his absence, but the grim smile with which Captain Kiddle—or rather Bill Brown, the pirate—greeted his appearance, indicated that it had not been unnoticed, and that the first drinking spell would be cruelly punished.

"I'm afraid you're right—he's only playin' with ye," said Turner, when Ned expressed this as his opinion.

From the first night, when the boatswain told them how Ned gave up his last shilling to aid his (Turner's) mother, the cabin boy had been a favorite with the crew, and the old hands were anxious about him all that day. When night came, and Ned—his duties in the cabin being ended—entered the fore-castle, an eager crowd gathered around him, but he had nothing to tell, except as above narrated.

"All right—then let him look out for himself!" exclaimed Blood, when Turner coincided with Ned's opinion that the first drinking bout would bring punishment. "All right—then let him look out for himself! I'm good for neither king nor country 'n' the first time he lays a finger on ye, my lad, I'll put my knife through him! I've got t' die anyhow, 'n' I might as well die for a good cause as a bad one!"

The speaker looked around as if bidding defiance to tale-bearers, but there was no necessity apparently—even the new men joined in the murmur of applause that greeted his threat. The new hands were already beginning to learn something of the character of their captain, and it was quite evident that those of them in the starboard watch did not relish what little they had learned.

Encouraged by the sympathy shown by his mates, the reckless sailor continued:

"I don't want any o' y' t' get in trouble on my account, but if ye'r men, ye'll stand by t' keep that brute from this here boy."

There was another responsive murmur, but Turner quickly saw that it came from the old hands, who were now in the minority, and he concluded it was better for all to stop this kind of talk.

"There's no use borryin' trouble," he said, "everythin' is goin' smooth, 'n' it may keep so. It's gettin' late, let's turn in, lads."

As the boatswain observed, everything was running smoothly, and did continue so. Not only that, but at the end of the second week it was clear that, pirate or not, the Volunteer was shaping her course for the Gold Coast, whether to trade for slaves, or ivory and gold-dust only the captain knew. Whichever it was, both Ned and Frank felt a great relief that they had escaped piracy.

Blood, however, was still suspicious, and would not believe that the captain had shipped such a large crew to engage in a respectable business—for slave-traders in those days included many large merchants in England, as well as America.

After a rapid run of four weeks, the Volunteer anchored off the coast, and then, after a boat-search for a hidden river, of which Captain Brown appeared to possess some mysterious information, the schooner hauled inshore.

The hidden river was found, the Volunteer ran up and anchored about a mile from its mouth. Trading for wax, ivory, gold dust, etc., was begun almost immediately, and while it was going on Captain Brown went ashore with a dozen men armed to the teeth.

He did not return until next morning, by which time a great deal of ivory was piled on shore, ready for embarkment, and came accompanied by several negroes in charge of a file of twenty slaves, fastened to a bamboo pole, which confined them all together.

The unfortunate slaves were put in irons in the forehold, and, while this was being done, the captain exhibited his goods, with which the principal black man seemed much pleased. They had a long conversation in the cabin, during which the negro cast many glances at Ned, who was called in several times, as was Frank, and then the slave escort left the schooner—all but one, who remained till next morning.

CHAPTER VII.

SLAVES TO A SLAVER!

THAT night it became noised through the ship, that the negro who remained was to act as guide

to a party to be sent into the interior next day, and this proved true. Twelve men, under command of the first mate, Bruce, were to guard the gold-dust carriers from the king to the ship.

As the party were about to push off from the shore, the captain called to them to wait, and continued:

"Here, you, Horton! Get ready to go along. You, too, Preble! You boys like to go ashore, if my memory serves me right."

This was the first time the captain had referred to their running away, and the malicious grin accompanying the words, made both boys feel rather uneasy.

"There'll be a couple packages for each of you to carry," continued the captain. "So you will not be able to take any arms. The packages are in the cabin—hurry now!"

The packages were neither large nor heavy, and could have been divided among the men without the slightest inconvenience.

"That villain means mischief, and I'm not going to be unprepared!" exclaimed Frank, as he noted the size and weight of the packages.

There was a small flat case containing a pair of pistols lying on a shelf, and, seizing this, Frank thrust it into the bosom of his loose shirt.

"We have our knives, besides," said Ned, as the captain, with an angry oath demanded what was detaining them, and picking up the packages they hurried on deck.

The boatswain and Blood were standing aft near the captain, when the latter after a suspicious glance at the boys, said with the same malicious grin:

"Now, boys, I hope this run ashore will be enough until you get home. Hurry up—the boats are waiting."

With his hand on the haft of his knife, Blood looked inquiringly at the boatswain, but the latter shook his head negatively, and the next moment the boats pushed off—Frank in one, and Ned in the other.

The king's quarters were one and half day's journey from the river, and, the party having camped out one night, arrived late in the afternoon of the second day.

During the night they were in camp, Frank extracted the pistols and ammunition from the case. He also examined the contents of the packages, without being detected, and finding, among other things, several pairs of pistols, he selected two of the kind called horse pistols, together with a quantity of ammunition, and dividing the weapons with Ned said:

"It would be worse than foolish, not to take advantage of this opportunity. These heavy pistols are almost as good as guns, and will answer for wild animals as well as men."

"Why not run away from them, if you feel so sure of our being in danger?" asked Ned. "We could get away easy enough, for they pay no attention to us—even when we are a hundred yards behind."

"That is probably because they are so sure of us," returned Frank. "As for our danger—I am not sure of that, and, besides, it may not be so bad as having to choose between turning pirate, and walking the plank."

"But they are taking slaves aboard—that isn't piracy," objected Ned.

"No, it is not, but, Ned, you don't know that fellow as well as I do. He's as cute as a rat. Why, if he sold his soul to the devil, and had one minute's start after death, he'd beat the Old Boy out of his bargain."

"But the slaves?"

"Are, probably, only a blind. He has taken aboard twenty, and they will serve to keep up the character of a slaver, for when overhauled by a cruiser he can say the rest died. Whether he means to cheat this negro king, as he calls himself, and leave us to his vengeance, or has some other plan to punish us, I cannot, of course, tell, but we are not sent with this party for any good purpose."

Ned had learned to respect the advice of his grave old-mannish companion, and asked:

"Well, what shall we do, Frank?"

"Watch and wait. The danger hanging over us can hardly be greater than those we would encounter in running away into this dense forest," replied Frank, adding:

"Hide your knife and pistols down the legs of your trousers, for these savages will steal whatever we show, if we should be left at their mercy."

"What do you mean?" asked Ned.

"I hardly know myself. Better do as I say, and go to sleep."

Arriving at the negro village, the king was found sitting in front of a hut of palmetto leaves. He made rather a curious appearance,

wearing a cocked hat and laced coat, but no other garment of any description!

Whatever inclination to mirth the king's dress might excite, the diabolical ferocity imprinted on his grim countenance was more than sufficient to repress. He was raw-boned and lean, and of very large frame—a living type of brutal strength and barbarity. Behind him stood several grim savages, who held his weapons, and on each side, at a greater distance, were rows of negroes, with their heads bent down and their arms crossed, awaiting his orders.

With the exception of the king and four young negro women who attended him, all the negroes were quite naked. The four young women, (who were the king's wives,) wore blue cotton gowns from hip to ankle, and another piece of the same cloth over the shoulders, while round their necks were rows of gold beads.

As the party drew near, Bruce ordered them to halt and advancing with the guide, entered into conversation with the king, who directed many glances toward the waiting group.

After some time Bruce returned to his party, and bade Ned and Frank kneel before the king, and open, and present to him, the contents of their packages.

"Kneel!" exclaimed Ned. "I kneel only to God, Mr. Bruce."

Frank, if not thus incited to rebel against it, would not have objected to this, apparently, mere matter of form; but, now encouraged by Ned's stand, he said:

"I'm not going to kneel to that savage, Mr. Bruce."

Apparently, Bruce, who was a fitting representative of his captain, did not wish to commit any act of violence in the presence of the king, for he contented himself with cursing them roundly and—wishing they were coming back to the schooner!

"When I give the signal," he continued, "you, Herrick, bring up the packages, and do as I've told these mutinous dogs to do. But, they'll be glad to kneel to him before long!"

With this order and threat, Bruce left the party and again entered into conversation with the king. In a few minutes he raised his hand, and Herrick advanced, and presented the packages in the manner directed by his superior.

While this was being done, the men, who were the worst of the new hands, were regarding the boys in a pitying way, and at length one said:

"You two are t' be left here for slaves. Better cut 'n' run while you've a chance. We'll be blind for a minit or two—eh, mates?"

The suggestion met with murmurs of approval; but it came too late. Even as it was made, a half-dozen negroes advanced to seize the boys, who, with an instinctive knowledge of their purpose, turned and fled toward the woods. It was useless, however, and as they were dragged past the white men, Frank appealed to them to save his companion and himself.

Hardened and crime-stained as they were, the men were moved by his appeal; but while they stood hesitating, Ned decided the matter by calling them cowardly, treacherous hounds, who had led Frank and himself into a trap, and hoping that they soon would receive their just deserts at the hand of the hangman!

This caused the men to abandon their half-formed purpose to rescue the boys—which would have resulted in a general massacre, as there were fully three hundred savages in sight—and Frank and Ned were bound and thrown into a hut.

The door had scarcely closed on them, when Ned began to reproach his companion, asking how much better off were they than if they had taken their chances in the forest.

"There," he said, "we could fight for our lives. Here we are tied up awaiting the pleasure of that black beast, who can order our heads off at any minute—and probably will, without delay. Oh, yes, you're very wise, but I wish you had kept your wisdom for yourself."

Frank did not reply, and after a while Ned, too, became silent and thoughtful.

They were in a dangerous position—more so, even, than they imagined, as they found, when a couple hours after they were thrown into the hut, the negro who had acted as guide to the party, and who spoke pretty good English, came and told them that the white men had returned to their ship; that they had been taken in exchange for twenty negroes because the king was tickled over the idea of having white slaves; and that the king—at the suggestion of the white chief (Bruce)—intended to scourge them into submission, and keep scourging them until they were killed, or cured of their dislike of kneeling to him.

After telling them this, and advising them to

submit before the scourging was begun—which would be early next morning—their late guide withdrew, and was replaced by two negroes with calabashes of water and cush-cush (corn boiled to a thick paste.)

Neither had any great desire for food, but Frank forced himself to eat, while Ned contented himself with drinking water, and watching his companion in misery "out of the corner of his eye."

About the time the meal was finished, Bamwa, the guide, appeared, and asked if the boys wanted more food before their hands were rebound.

Frank replied that he did not, and Ned's untasted food was sufficient answer that he needed none, but, while the savages were tying his hands, the former complained bitterly of the tightness of his bonds, and Bamwa ordered that the cords be relaxed.

Had he not warned the prisoners of what was in store for them, Bamwa would have removed their bonds altogether, for there was little chance of escape, and even if they did succeed, death in one hundred forms awaited them in the forest.

It was dark now, but outside the door—which was nothing but a rude hurdle swung between two posts—the prisoners could see a negro guard sitting on a mat, smoking. Neither spoke, nor had addressed a word to the other since Ned had ceased reproaching his companion. The latter was engaged with a plan for their escape, while the former was reflecting on the injustice he had done his friend, who would never have been in his present perilous position but for his devotion to him (Ned).

While thus engaged, Ned fell asleep, and did not awake until roused by a rough shaking. Looking up, he found Frank bending over him, and, to his astonishment, both were free from their bonds. Not only that, but, after making a sign for silence, Frank pointed to the rear of the hut, where an opening large enough to pass through had been cut in the woven twigs that formed the walls.

Outside sat the negro on guard—puffing at his huge stone pipe occasionally, and nodding continually, half asleep, and wholly unconscious of what was going on within.

"Quick! Out through there, but don't stand up," whispered Frank, and Ned crawled out on his hands and knees, in which position he remained until the former joined him; then they took a survey of their situation.

The hut from which they had escaped was near the center of the glade in which the village was situated. It was late—nearly midnight; the fires built during the early part of the night were burning low, only a few of the savages were stirring, and choosing a path which seemed least dangerous, Frank laid himself at full length and began rolling over and over toward the edge of the forest, Ned following his example.

Stopping every few minutes to look about, and moving with the greatest caution, it required a full half-hour to pass the line of fires, but after that they moved more rapidly, and in a few minutes stood erect within the trees on the edge of the glade.

"We are safe!" exclaimed Ned.

"Yes, for the present, but we must push on as fast as possible. At the latest, daylight will find the negroes in pursuit."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE FOREST.

WITHOUT a compass or the stars to guide them, ignorant of the country, and with only a vague idea of the direction in which the river and coach lay, the young adventurers plunged into the dark, dense forest, and when daylight came had placed many miles behind them.

Both were thoroughly tired out at daylight, and Frank assented to his companion's proposition that they should rest for a few minutes.

There had been no time for conversation during their hurried flight—avoiding the low hanging branches of trees, and the wild beasts whose cries rendered the night hideous, had occupied the attention of the fugitives, but Ned was anxious to talk to his friend, and now that they were at rest, he opened with:

"A drink of water would go good, now—eh, Frank?"

"Yes, it would—I hope you'll not suffer—that is; I hope we'll soon run across some."

Frank spoke anxiously and turned to look at his companion. As his eyes fell upon Ned, he started and turned pale, but controlling himself by a powerful effort, he quietly continued:

"Sit still, Ned—still as a statue. There's something near you I want to hit, and if you move a muscle you'll scare it."

While speaking, Frank had drawn out and leveled the heavy horse-pistol at a large snake which was coiled and waving its head, its forked tongue darting in and out, awaiting the first movement of the unconscious Ned to strike.

With the last word, Frank fired at the forked tongue. His hand was steady as a rock, his aim good, and when Ned turned his head to see the game, the huge snake, with half its head carried off, was writhing a half-dozen feet away.

Ned grasped the situation in an instant, and turning to express his gratitude, saw Frank pale and trembling, and almost fainting. The strain had been so great, that had the poor fellow been on his feet when his nerves relaxed, he certainly would have fallen.

"How can I thank you!" exclaimed Ned, his remorse for the injustice of the previous day increased by his friend's agitation.

"Oh, don't speak of it," said Frank, shuddering, "let us go and look for water."

As they proceeded on their uncertain way, Ned, anxious to make amends for the past, and express his gratitude for the present, said:

"I acted and spoke very meanly yesterday, Frank, but I hope you'll overlook it—and to think of your saving me from a horrible death to-day!"

He had commenced quietly and penitently, and the outburst of genuine gratitude and self-reproach with which he finished proved too much for Frank, who laughingly asked:

"And what would you have had me do, Ned, let the snake bite you because you were a little rusty yesterday?"

Ned looked confused, and muttered something about being down right mean instead of a little rusty, but the laugh put them on the old footing, and he went on with renewed vigor, notwithstanding his constantly increasing thirst.

Soon, this thirst became almost unbearable, and both were in a very exhausted condition, when, about noon, they came upon a small stream of rather brackish water.

Ned was dashing forward when Frank restrained him.

"Go easy," he said, "if you are too eager, the result may be as bad as none at all."

Still under the influence of the renewal—as he considered it—of their friendship, Ned submitted, and did not at once indulge in the tremendous draught he had promised himself, which was very fortunate for him, as, had he done so, the result might have been serious illness.

Having satisfied their thirst, the next question was how to obtain food, and Ned remarked that he would like to have some of the cush-cush he had refused the previous evening.

"But, not at the same price, I presume?" said Frank.

"No, no! What do you think of our chances of getting away?" asked Ned.

"From that particular tribe, I think we are safe," replied Frank. "Rolling over the bare, hard earth, we cannot have left any marks by which to trace our course, but we must look out for other tribes. This river must lead to the sea and by following it we shall not only reach the coast, but be certain of water and food!"

"Food?" echoed Ned.

"Yes—fish. I've got a line in my pocket, and, while I'm digging for worms, you gather some dry wood, and dig a hole in which to bake the fish."

Springing up as he spoke, Frank set about looking for bait while Ned hurried back into the woods.

In a few minutes the former, (having procured all the worms he needed,) began fishing and almost immediately hooked a fine fish. He had just landed it, when several sharp cries, followed first by the report of a pistol—which he knew to be Ned's—and then by a roar such as Frank had never before heard, reached him from the forest.

Dropping the fish, and drawing the heavy pistol as he ran, Frank dashed into the forest, and guided by a second pistol-shot, arrived upon the scene of a battle between Ned and a native on one side, and a huge gorilla on the other.

Although wounded in several places, the gorilla had all the advantage when Frank arrived on the scene. He had the native—a mere boy in appearance—down under one foot and had just knocked Ned senseless with a blow that would have broken his skull, had he not dodged and received it slantwise.

On the appearance of his third enemy, the gorilla advanced waving his club threateningly. He had come within ten yards of Frank, who stood stock still awaiting him, when the

native, who had been playing 'possum, hurled his spear with surprising strength. It struck the gorilla in the right arm, causing him to drop his club, and with a humanlike cry of rage and pain, he turned on his assailant.

The native had come dangerously close, and with a few mighty leaps the gorilla was upon him, but Frank was not idle, and as the plucky little fellow was stricken down by the king of the African forest, the latter in turn fell with a bullet fired through the ear, and into his brain.

Frank had run up to within two yards of the gorilla before firing, and the result was instant death.

It was with his own spear that the native had been struck; the blow did no damage to his hard head, and he was on his feet running to look at Ned as soon as Frank.

Ned was already recovering consciousness, and on discovering this, the native testified his delight by dancing around him and uttering joyous cries. Then he went back to the dead gorilla and danced around him, but the cries he uttered were those of contempt and defiance, accompanied by threatening gestures.

While the really plucky little fellow—he was four feet in height—was thus engaged, Ned sat up and became so interested and amused that he forgot, for the moment, the splitting pain in his head. Suddenly the native caught sight of him, and running to him, knelt and kissed his hand. Then prostrating himself before the astonished boy, the native raised Ned's foot and placed it on his neck—all of which Frank, who was an interested spectator, understood as meaning that the native was Ned's slave.

"How do you feel? Good enough to eat some nice fish?" asked Frank.

"I've got a splitting head, but it hasn't spoiled my appetite," replied Ned.

He arose, and began to gather up the wood as he spoke, but the native took it from him, and completed the work, causing Frank to laugh and say:

"You're all right now, Ned—you've got a servant."

The native not only carried the wood to the bank of the stream, but, on seeing the fish Frank had considered such a prize, snorted contemptuously, and in a few minutes speared two much larger. These he quickly cleaned and cooked, and they were soon disposed of—gun-powder proving an excellent substitute for salt, and hunger all the "sauce" that was needed.

While eating, Ned told how he had, in his search for dry wood, come across the native and the gorilla. The former had foolishly thrown a spear, wounding and enraging the animal, which, otherwise, would not have molested him, and when Ned's attention was attracted by the shrill cries of the man and the thunder-like roars of the animal, the native was about to have his brains beaten out. While still some distance away, Ned fired the horse-pistol, and missing, came quite close to render the small pistol more effective—so close that, as he fired, the gorilla sprang and knocked him down.

"And you know the rest," said Ned, in conclusion.

"Which is that you've made a friend at the risk of your life—and a valuable one he'd be, if he could only talk English! However, we must keep moving along," and Frank arose as a signal for their immediate departure.

Ned and the native followed Frank's example, but the direction they were taking seemed to alarm the negro, who, plucking Ned's sleeve, motioned him to go in the opposite direction.

Ned called his friend's attention to this, but Frank only laughed, saying:

"He wants to take you back and introduce you to his friends."

Although said in jest, this was the truth, and the little native exhibited great perplexity as well as alarm on seeing they intended to pursue the course they had taken. After a few minutes he again plucked Ned's sleeve, and motioning that he was going away, but would return, started back at full speed.

CHAPTER IX.

CAPTURED—ESCAPED.

NED called attention to the great rate at which the native was traveling, and this was the first notice of his departure Frank received. He looked very grave, as he turned and saw the native flying along the narrow path on the river bank.

"What's the matter?" asked Ned.

"Nothing—yet. I hope your black friend is

all right. He looked like an honest fellow—but we mustn't trust to looks in this place more than any other, so, stir yourself, my boy."

Ned "stirred" himself, and they made good progress until nightfall, when they camped for the night, Frank's line furnishing fish, and the neighboring trees (where Ned espied some birds' nests,) eggs, which the latter roasted in the ashes of the fire that baked the fish.

Both were hungry, and eat heartily—with the result that the drowsy god claimed them much earlier than usual, it being but nine o'clock when both were sound asleep.

An hour after, they were awakened to find themselves again prisoners in the hands of Kitonga—the negro king, to whom they had been sold—and, in less than a quarter of an hour, they were back in the village from which they had escaped the previous night.

As if to show the hopelessness of another attempt to escape, the boys were placed unbound in the same hut through which Frank had cut the hole, but now a guard stood on each side.

"This looks dangerous," commented Frank, adding: "I can now understand the little black fellow's alarm. We must have made a loop after leaving here, and he saw we were walking back to our starting point."

"I wish," he continued, after a moment, "that I had not been so confoundedly sure—conceited—of what I was doing."

He evidently expected more reproaches from Ned—indeed he was inviting reproach—but the latter had learned a lesson from the past, and soothingly replied:

"Never mind, Frank, never mind—you did your best, and angels can do no more."

"Perhaps the little fellow, seeing the way we were traveling, has gone for help."

"Why, do you think he belongs to another tribe?" asked Frank.

"I do. I was looking at him pretty closely, and I think he's a dwarf. One thing, I feel sure of—that although so small, he is much older than you or I."

Further conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Bamwa, the interpreter, who appeared to have taken a liking to the boys, and who told them that, notwithstanding their running away, he had, through the king's wives, prevailed upon Kitonga not to torture and kill them, as he had declared he would when their escape was reported to him.

"Your guard's head was cut off five minutes after you were missed," concluded Bamwa.

"And what will be done with us?" asked Frank.

"After you have prostrated yourselves before the king, and obtained his pardon, you will be given to his wives, whose slaves you will be. They are much interested in you, and your duties will be light."

"Much obliged to them for their interest," said Frank, while his companion in misfortune asked:

"Suppose we don't prostrate ourselves and ask the old brute's pardon—what then?"

Bamwa gasped on hearing the epithet Ned applied to his royal master, and looked around in terror to see if the guards had heard it, forgetting that they did not understand English.

"Hush! You will not be so foolish; you would be tortured to death until you died. Nothing but the interference of the king's wives has saved you from that to-night," he replied, and, as if fearing to hear more treasonable expressions, hurried out of the hut.

For a few minutes after Bamwa's departure silence reigned in the hut. There was plenty of food for thought in the interpreter's communication, and although by obeying his instructions punishment could be avoided, still they would be slaves, subject to every whim of the king and his four (young) wives.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked Frank, after a while. "Shall we stoop to conquer—submit for the present, and watch our chance to escape? Slavers are liable to call here at any time, and they would never refuse to help us."

Straws show which way the wind blows, and the many little incidents which it would not be of interest to relate here, but which revealed to Frank the intensely independent character of his comrade, led him to expect a scornful rejection of any suggestion tending toward submission.

To his astonishment, Ned quietly replied: "I don't see anything else we can do. Fortunately, they don't appear to suspect that we are armed, so when it comes to the worst, as it must some day, we won't cross the Styx without company."

This was so different from what he expected, that Frank could not refrain from saying:

"That's taking a sensible view of it, Ned, and I'm glad you look at it that way."

He knew it was not fear that caused the change in Ned, but he had no suspicion that the next words he himself uttered gave expression to the thought which rendered the usually hot-tempered, independent boy so submissive.

"Of course," continued Frank, "if you would not do as this fellow says we must, I should have to stand by you, but it would only end in our being killed."

"Oh, there's no use butting one's head against a stone wall."

The words were spoken carelessly enough, and gave no indication of the anger and indignation, which Ned suppressed, at the thought:

"I've brought him into this trouble, and if I don't submit, he won't—and that will be the end of him."

More at ease now, Frank suggested that they should resume their interrupted sleep, and using the floor-mats for pillows, both stretched out on the hard earth which formed their bed—quite different, as it occurred to Ned, to the big feather-stuffed bed-tick in the farm-house near Falmouth.

Next morning, they were aroused by the entrance of Bamwa, accompanied by two negroes carrying cush-cush and water.

"You will do as I told you last night?" asked the interpreter, almost anxiously, when his companions had gone.

Ned merely nodded, while Frank replied that they would.

"It is well," said Bamwa, looking much relieved. "I will come when the king is ready to receive you. Be very careful, and do nothing to anger him. If you pass the morning safely, you need fear nothing. As slaves of the king's wives you will be well treated, and your life a happy one."

From the standpoint of the African, ever careless of the future, Bamwa's assertion was probably the truth, but the boys were not destined to test it.

After again warning the boys to be careful—his words being directed at Ned—the friendly negro went to ascertain if the king was ready, and what humor he was in.

An hour elapsed before Bamwa returned to announce that "the Great Kitonga would deign to listen to the petition of his slaves."

"You must speak to me for a little while," said Bamwa, "and I will make your petition for forgiveness."

Notwithstanding the danger that this petition (which was no matter of form) might be refused, and his head ordered off, Ned grinned at the interpreter's high-flown speech, thereby causing that well-intentioned person much uneasiness.

"Be careful!" was Bamwa's parting injunction, as, halting them some distance from Kitonga, he hastened forward to announce the anxiety (!) of the slaves to make their petition.

The desired permission being granted, and the boys being on their knees before the ferocious-looking king, Bamwa said to Frank:

"You must now talk to me for a few minutes. Look sad—sad as you can, for the danger is not past."

The interpreter spoke more truth than he knew—the danger was only approaching.

Assuming as meek and lowly an air as he could, Frank said:

"I guess my face is fit for a funeral, and, backed by your eloquence, it ought to carry me through."

"As this isn't a very easy position, you might sail in now and tell him my heart is too sad to say any more."

Despite the fact that he was in the presence of royalty, Ned grinned on hearing this, and unfortunately Kitonga caught him in the act—much to the dismay of Bamwa, who delivered the petition (!) in a rather confused manner.

Apparently, not noticing his interpreter's confusion, Kitonga motioned Frank to arise and step aside, while Bamwa told Ned to say a few words.

"Oh, fire away! Say what you please, but make it brief. There's a confounded stone under my right knee, and I feel like a hen on a hot griddle."

This response, delivered in a carelessly impatient tone and manner, alarmed Bamwa, who, assuming an air of severity, warned Ned that the king was watching him, and implored him to say something more, with an assumption of sadness.

Out of regard for the friendly interpreter, Ned did assume a most miserable expression of countenance, but spoiled the effect by completely upsetting Bamwa when he replied:

"All right! Let the ugly brute look—it may improve the expression of his countenance, and it can't be made worse. He's the worst looking case I've ever laid eyes on."

Bamwa was horrified at this speech, but again Kitonga passed over his confused address, and motioning Ned to stand up, spoke to the interpreter, who in turn informed the reckless boy that the king desired a drink, pointing as he spoke to a gourd and cup standing on a mat midway between the master and slave.

Picking up the gourd and the cup, Ned advanced and, following Bamwa's instructions, knelt and handed the cup to the king, who held it while his slave filled it.

Then, with a malicious grin, Kitonga dashed the water in Ned's face; but, he reckoned without his host.

The water had scarcely touched Ned before Kitonga was knocked off his mat, being struck in the face by the water gourd which the angry boy had hurled at him with all his strength.

For a moment the warriors, who stood back of the king as already described, appeared to be paralyzed with horror, but as Kitonga scrambled to his feet, they rushed forward to avenge his outraged majesty.

Meantime, Ned had drawn both his pistols and prepared to die where he stood, as was evidenced by his cry:

"Have nothing to do with this, Frank! They won't hurt you if you stay out of it! Good-by!"

By way of reply, Frank fired his heavy pistol, and as the leading warrior fell, sprung to Ned's side.

"Come on! To the woods!" he cried.

At the same moment several gun-shots rung out from the woods, and the savages halted irresolutely as a half-dozen sailors, headed by Blood and Turner, made their appearance at the edge of the forest! The halt was only momentary, however, and before the boys were half-way across the opening, the savages, led by Kitonga, were close upon them.

"Wheel and fire! Then turn to the right!" panted Frank.

He turned as he spoke, as did Ned, and both fired at the nearest of the pursuing savages. Which fired the fatal shot was never known, but between them lay the honor of killing the ferocious Kitonga.

The fall of the chief created a panic, which was increased by a volley from the sailors, who, now that the boys had divided—Ned running off to the right, and Frank to the left—had an opportunity to fire without damage to their comrades.

Circling about as they ran, the fugitives had almost reached their friends, when, recovering from the panic caused by the fall of their chief, the savages again rushed forward, uttering yells of rage, and firing showers of arrows as they came.

It was a critical moment. Several of the sailors had been wounded by the arrows. The savages were coming on, regardless of the volleys from guns and pistols, and were close upon the whites, when a shower of arrows and spears issued from the forest, over the heads of the sailors.

It was a deadly shower in more than one sense, for not only were many stricken down, but every man struck died.

Following the discharge of arrows and spears a swarm of little men—none over five feet in height—led by Ned's "slave," dashed into the opening.

The late pursuers now became the pursued, for without a moment's hesitation they turned and fled, terror-stricken by the deadly character of the dwarfs' spears, the poisonous character of the dwarfs' arrows.

The first to grasp Ned's hand, and then Frank's, was the little fellow rescued from the gorilla the previous day. He was accompanied by one of the tribe, who proved to be an interpreter, and who informed the wondering white men that the "slave" was the son of the chief of the Akkas, and that the latter wished to thank those who had saved the young chief's life.

CHAPTER X.

WITH THE DWARFS.

THE rout of the Kitongas being complete, their village destroyed, many of their best warriors dead (and many more prisoners) the Akkas were ready to return to the camp, where they had left the old chief, with a guard to protect him.

"Longa, son of Batwa, awaits your pleasure," said the interpreter, when all the "spitfire" warriors—as Blood called them—had returned from the pursuit of the Kitongas, and taking this as a hint that they wished to depart, Ned, to whom the words were addressed, signified his readiness to proceed to the camp.

On the march, the boys learned, that, having received a hint of what had happened from one of Bruce's party, Blood and Turner, with four of the old hands, had deserted the schooner, and traveling day and night, arrived on the outskirts of the Kitonga village, just as Frank and Ned were brought before the king.

Through the interpreter, they learned that after leaving them, Longa had hurried back to his father, who with a part of his tribe was traveling to the sea coast, to make arrangements for trading a large quantity of ivory, gold-dust, wax, etc., either with ships, or with tribes near the coast.

Full of the spirit of adventure, Longa—who by the way, was much older than either of the boys—had traveled many miles ahead of his party, and the return journey was long and arduous. He had seen the danger the boys were more than likely to encounter, and, on acquainting the old chief of his rescue, the latter immediately dispatched Longa, and nearly all his men to their rescue.

Batwa, who was a stout old man about as tall as his son, greeted the white party very cordially, and made a speech to his people, which, from his gestures, and the acting of the listeners, it was easy to see, was a recital of the story of Longa's rescue.

There was much cheering at the conclusion of the speech, and the Akkas began to crowd around the boys, but the young chief drove them away, while the interpreter informed Ned that he and Frank were to eat with the old chief, and their friends with Longa.

During, and after the meal, (which was quite a lengthy affair, and more sumptuous than anything the boys had tasted since leaving port) the old chief heard the story of Ned's adventures since leaving home, which, of course, included Frank's story.

"How do you expect to get back to your country?" asked the chief, when Ned's story was finished.

Being told that they were trying to get to the coast, where they would ship on the first vessel found, the old chief showed great pleasure, and summoned his son, evidently to tell him the good news.

"But your friends—they cannot go back to the rascal, your captain?" asked Longa.

"No, poor fellows, they lose everything—money and clothes—like Frank and myself," replied Ned.

The young chief seemed rather pleased to hear this, and after some conversation with his father, said that if the party would accompany the Akkas to the coast, and assist in the trading, the chief would gladly allow them a share of the goods.

"We have some gold-dust and wax with us," continued Longa (of course, through the interpreter), "but there is much more, and a great deal of ivory, for which we will send back carriers, if you will only join us, for, if you are there, we will not be cheated."

This offer was too good to be refused, and the boys having signified their acceptance, Longa immediately dispatched twenty-five men for the balance of the ivory and gold-dust.

While the young chief was thus engaged, his father asked many questions concerning the country from which the boys came, but at length, growing drowsy, he permitted them to retire, and, accompanied by the interpreter, they joined their friends, to whom Ned related the conversation with Batwa, and his acceptance of the latter's offer.

Ned was still talking, when Longa joined the party, and when the boy finished, the young chief made a lengthy speech, which, being interpreted, proved to be an offer to recover what belonged to the men from the captain of the Volunteer.

"Some of his ivory must be yet on shore," said Longa. "We will seize it and keep it, if he does not give what is yours. Our carriers will not return for ten days, and we can start before sunrise to-morrow, so there will be no danger of missing our people on their return."

This offer, too, was promptly accepted—Blood, in particular, being delighted over the prospect of forcing Captain Brown to pay what was due, and give them their kits.

Accordingly, next morning, before dawn, the entire party, consisting of one hundred and

twenty-five Akkas and the eight whites, started to bring Captain Brown to terms.

With the exception of the old chief and a guard of ten men, who traveled slowly in the rear, the party pushed on so rapidly that about nine that night they were within a quarter-mile of the Volunteer.

Leaving the main body, Longa, with the white men, went forward to reconnoiter, and quickly discovered a dozen Kitongas lying near a pile of elephants' tusks—evidently awaiting embarkation.

Lying out in the river was the Volunteer, and from the noises and boisterous singing on board, Captain Brown and his men were enjoying themselves to the fullest that unlimited rum and freedom would permit.

"He's probably carried the piracy question to-day, 'n' they're celebratin' the golden prospects t'-night," said Blood, as they listened to sounds of revelry.

"Bet he didn't say anythin' about their beautiful chance of a hempen halter," returned Turner.

Longa, meantime, had returned with the main body, and, placing his men so as to surround the Kitongas, stepped into the light of the fire, and demanded their surrender—promising that they should not be harmed if no resistance was made.

Having no right to expect such leniency, the Kitongas, being hopelessly outnumbered, eagerly accepted Longa's terms, and were bound and placed under guard.

This was scarcely done, when the fun aboard the Volunteer changed to fighting, first simply fistfights, (as the watchers afterward learned,) but this quickly gave place to knives and pistols.

Even had they wished to go aboard those on shore had no means of reaching the schooner, and they could do nothing but listen to the yells and curses of their late comrades, who were forestalling the work of the hangman by shooting and stabbing each other. Soon, two or three jumped or were driven overboard, and the cries that followed announced their fate.

Slaves invariably attract sharks.

"They must be getting used up," observed Frank, as at the end of a half-hour, the shots became less frequent, while the cries and groans increased.

The fighting which began below, had been carried on later on deck, where the struggling forms could be plainly seen in the moonlight but one by one these disappeared from view, until at the expiration of an hour none remained, and nothing broke the stillness of the night, save the groans and curses of the wounded and dying.

"Isn't it horrible!" exclaimed Ned, shuddering as his imagination pictured the scene of slaughter.

"Very—but we ain't in it, an' it's on'y a case o' dog eat dog after all," returned Blood.

"Ye see, mates, what we've escaped by tryin' t' do these here lads a good turn," said the boatswain, turning to the other sailors.

"Ay, ay, Tom; an' lucky it was we shaped our course 'cordin' t' the way Blood 'n' yerself advised," replied old Dick.

"I wish we could get aboard; we might be able to do something," put in Ned. "Just listen to those groans!"

"Let 'em groan!" growled Blood, in a harsh tone, "let 'em groan all they like! What 'd they do with you?"

Ned remained silent, and Blood continued:

"We can't do anythin' until mornin', anyhow, an' not then till we build a raft; so we might as well turn in."

CHAPTER XI.

THE BLACK FLAG—AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

As no one could rest—at least, no white man—within hearing distance of the schooner, the entire party moved further up the river, where, large fires being built, and sentinels stationed, they rested undisturbed until morning.

With the first streaks of dawn Ned was up. He could scarcely rest until then, thinking of the wounded and dying, without anyone to give them a drink, for he had decided that it had been a fight to the death; as, indeed, it proved.

Blood was inclined to be angry when Ned awakened him with a request to "get up and build that raft," but, his liking for the boy overcame his dislike for those aboard the schooner, and, arousing the entire party, he set them at work, and by the time breakfast was prepared, the raft was lying on the beach, ready for launching.

The river was shallow, and, after breakfast, saplings were cut and trimmed into poles. With

the aid of these, and the tide favoring, the first party—which consisted of all the white persons—reached the schooner.

There was no sign of life as they approached, nor a sound heard as they made fast to the Volunteer, and Ned expressed the opinion of all when, in an awed whisper, he said:

"They are all dead."

Climbing aboard, the first form that met the gaze of the visitors was that of the captain, a bloody cutlass in his hand, and a half-dozen men with cloven skulls lying about him.

All over the deck blood-covered men lay in twos and threes—some shot, some stabbed, and all but a few dead.

Below the scene was not so bad. There was not enough room for much fighting, but in the cabin the first and second mates were found locked in deadly embrace.

All found below were dead; but, of those on deck, seven recovered altogether, and a few more lingered for a day or two. These men were unconscious when found by Ned and Frank, who immediately, on boarding the schooner, began to search for the living, while their companions, apparently, cared only to see who were dead, and how they fell.

The first man to recover consciousness was one of the old hands, who related the story of the fight.

As Blood had surmised, the captain called all hands aft, the previous evening, and after picturing the profit and pleasures of a pirate's life, announced his intention of hoisting the black flag, and ordered those who objected to sailing under it to step forward.

Only one man had the inclination, or the courage, if possessing the inclination, to obey the order, and him the captain shot dead before he could speak a word.

The man thus brutally murdered was known as "Chips,"—the ship's carpenter, a quiet, good-natured fellow who was liked by all on board, and there was an ominous muttering among the men as he fell, but this ceased, as the captain, pistol in hand, roared:

"Don't stand there muttering like monkeys! If any of you have a complaint to make, step out and make it! We might as well finish this business, while I've got my hand in."

The men shrunk back in silence, and he continued:

"No complaint, eh? Lucky for ye! To-morrow all must take the oath; to-night all can do as they please. Heave up a barrel of rum, and drink success to the 'Jolly Roger'!"

The men were not slow in availing themselves of the captain's liberality, and poor "Chips" was forgotten until they began to get drunk—which was shortly before the capture of the Kitongas. Then the fate of "Chips" became the subject of conversation, and much muttering and discontent was being manifested, when a message from the captain summoned all hands to the cabin.

The captain, who, with Bruce, had been drinking in the cabin, knew what was going on forward (having been informed by one of the new men), and, when the half-drunken crew staggered into his presence, began to abuse and threaten them, calling them mutinous dogs, and swearing he would shoot the first man that spoke or stirred until he gave the order to do so.

As he uttered the threat, the second mate, who was among the men, lurched forward and the captain fired, missing the intended victim, but killing the man behind him. Even then the fighting might not have begun had not Bruce grappled with the second mate, who called on the men to stand by him.

On hearing the mate's call for assistance, the captain fired another shot; then the battle began—a dozen or more of the new men fighting against their comrades. These men were armed, and had been ordered to remain sober, which gave them a great advantage over the others—and Bill Brown was a host in himself.

Before this story was finished, the two boats, which were sent ashore immediately after boarding the schooner, returned with Longa, and all of his people that could crowd into them, but if they came with sight-seeing intentions only, they must have been sorely disappointed, for, at Turner's request, their young chief set them at work washing and cleaning up the decks.

Many hands make quick, as well as light work, and by the time the sailors had carried the wounded to their hammocks, and attended to their wants, the dead had been tossed overboard and the decks washed down.

The "medicine-man" of the Akkas, who came aboard in one of the boats, proved a veri-

table medicine man, for his knowledge of herbs, and skill in caring for wounds, enabled some of the men to leave their hammocks that evening.

Immediately after seeing the wounded placed in the hammocks, Ned's attention was attracted by noise in the forehold, and, remembering the twenty slaves, he, with the assistance of Frank, removed the hatch. The unfortunate negroes were in a pitiable condition, having had neither food nor water since noon the previous day, and had been driven frantic with fear during the fight.

Ned immediately notified the boatswain who, after removing the irons, supplied the astonished slaves with food and water, and then sent them ashore to be cared for by Longa's men—the young chief promising to guard them to their home in exchange for their acting as carriers as far as the village of the Akkas.

After the removal of the slaves, an examination of the hold revealed the cargo, just as it was when the Volunteer left port, and, on inquiring among the wounded, Blood learned that the suspicion he had expressed, namely, that the captain intended to cheat the natives out of the goods, was nothing more than the truth.

"Well, I don't see why Longa need wait for any other vessel," said Frank, who had been among the party exploring the hold, "we've got everything he wants."

"And we've got what we want—a vessel to bring us home," smilingly observed Ned.

"Ye-e!" both right enough," said the boatswain, "but who's a-goin' t' navigate? I kin sail her, but who's t' navigate her?"

"I'll attend to that part of it," quietly replied Blood.

"You! Kin you navigate?" asked Turner, staring in astonishment, like the others, at the idea of a common seaman understanding navigation.

"I said I would attend to the navigation," replied Blood, a little testily. "I was not talking for amusement, but if you doubt my ability, you are at perfect liberty to manage it yourself."

This language caused even more astonishment than the statement that the speaker understood navigation, and, evidently annoyed by the attention he had attracted, Blood walked aft.

"Just where he belongs," remarked the boatswain, as he watched the ex-smuggler, pacing back and forth. "Just where he belongs, mates—regular quarter-deck talk 'n' quarter-deck walk. Jim Blood may've had a come-down, but he didn't learn that kind o' talk in no fo'k'sle."

"Better 'lect him cap'n," suggested one of the men, and the boatswain's prompt and hearty assent settled the question.

"You two go 'n' ask him what we're t' do, 'n' tell him we've 'lected him cap'n," said Turner, addressing Frank and Ned, who were as much astonished by the change in the ex-smuggler as any of the others.

"Very well; I will act as captain until we reach port," Blood agreed, when Ned had, in his own way, made known the wishes of the men.

"And your orders?" suggested Ned.

"I will deliver my orders," replied Blood, and walking forward addressed the crew:

"I understand it is your wish that I should act as your captain. That I am willing to do, but unless you are prepared to obey my orders without the slightest hesitation, it will be better to appoint another. Do not let my knowledge of navigation prevent your doing so, for what I know is at your service."

Removing his cap, and making an awkward bow, the boatswain replied:

"Cap'n, you're the man for the place, 'n' the on'y one. If you'll 'tend t' the navigation, I'll 'tend t' the 'bedience. Just give yer orders, if ye please—right, mates?"

"Ay, ay!" came the prompt and hearty response from the seamen.

CHAPTER XII.

A DANGEROUS SPORT.

SIX weeks after the fight among the pirates, the Volunteer was again near the mouth of the Garonne—a spot much frequented by cruisers and privateersmen.

At that particular period England and France were—for a wonder—at peace, Bordeaux, therefore, was a neutral port, and the Volunteer was still without the three mile limit, when the wind died away, leaving her rocking idly in a dead calm as night approached.

"We have enough hands to manage, but not to fight her, so, we must keep a sharp lookout,

for this is a dangerous spot," warned Captain Blood, who was, of course, well-acquainted with all that part of the coast.

"Ay, ay, sir; as you say 'tis a dangerous spot," assented Turner, who was acting as first officer.

"An' it'll take a sharp eye t' see anythin' t'-night with the fog that's settin' down on us," he added, referring to a white mist that was surrounding the vessel so thickly as to prevent their seeing any great distance.

It was just eight bells, (midnight,) and the captain and Turner were standing forward, looking anxiously about them, while these remarks were being made.

Ned and Frank now came on deck with the others whose watch it was, and the former going forward was in time to hear:

"You are right, Turner; we may wake up to find ourselves among a whole nest of cruisers, and privateersmen. There's no seeing anything to-night."

This caused Ned to glance around, and seeing the truth of the captain's remarks, to wonder why a boat was not sent ashore for hands—to ship whom was the main object of putting into Bordeaux, for there were but fifteen of the original crew of the Volunteer left.

Ned and Frank had been made midshipmen, and with Turner, assisted the captain in the management of the schooner, so that the former was not out of place in suggesting:

"Couldn't we send the long-boat ashore for more men, captain?"

The captain looked thoughtfully at Turner, who nodded approvingly, saying:

"We're not more'n four or five miles off shore."

"Well, the idea's a good one; our only hope of being in shape to fight lies in adopting it—but who is to go ashore? I cannot leave the vessel while she's in such a dangerous position, and you are unacquainted on shore."

"Why not send the youngsters, sir? They got ashore all right before, an' that old thief that sent 'em back t' us will do anythin' for money."

"It is the only way," assented the captain, after a few moments' hesitation, adding:

"Better go at once, and take four good men with you, Ned."

"Ay, ay, sir!" joyfully returned Ned, pleased to have an opportunity of calling on Monsieur Pitou.

"And you may warn the rascal that I am in command of the privateer for which the men are wanted, and that he will suffer sore for the least trickery or treachery."

"That will prevent him from attempting any double dealing, I believe," added Blood, as the long-boat pushed off.

"And he won't find it an easy job t' fool them boys a second time, anyhow," commented Turner.

"Very likely; but I think the fact that they will state the men are for a privateer, of which I am commander, will prevent any attempt to trick them."

"Not a doubt of it, sir—an' it was a good trick on him," chuckled Turner.

"It was no trick—that is, if you and the old hands will see things from my point of view," quietly returned Blood.

"Of course," he continued, "a privateer without papers, would be treated as a pirate, and all depends upon our escaping contact with cruisers of every kind and country, until we can get to the French authorities at Bordeaux. If we succeed in doing that, our story will be believed, the vessel and cargo condemned, and our share—the four officers—and the old crew, if necessary—will enable us to take her out with a French commission."

"I reckon it would, sir—but you're a Britisher yourself?"

"Oh, yes!"—with a bitter laugh—"I'm a Britisher, as you say, but my allegiance to the English crown will not prevent my accepting a French commission to get this vessel to the United States."

Turner stared, but made no comment. The other had proved himself one who would tolerate neither question nor comment, ruling as absolutely as the captain of a man-of-war.

"If we are fortunate enough to get into Bordeaux to-morrow," continued Blood, "we will be able to correct any mistakes in the men that may be sent us to-night, and, then, if anything smaller than a frigate comes athwart us, we'll try our metal with it—our sailing is good against anything I've ever met."

He was talking more to himself than Turner, and the latter would not have interrupted him,

had he not noticed that the mist which enveloped them was lifting.

"Fog's liftin' a little, sir," he observed.

"So much the worse unless those boys are on the way back. Send a couple men aloft—and you had better begin sending up rockets."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

The mist continued to clear, until just before daylight they could see quite a distance on either side, and with the first streaks of dawn a long, low craft, without a stick of canvas set, was revealed floating in the water about a mile astern, and to windward.

"I'm afraid that fellow's goin' t' give us trouble, sir," observed Turner. "There's a wicked look about him—more like a French privateer than any other craft I— See! she is lowerin' her boats!"

"I see," quietly returned the captain turning his glass leeward. "Load with grape, and have all the muskets on deck. If the calm remains with us for an hour, we may beat him off."

"Four boats, 'n' fifty or sixty men! We're nine, all told."

The captain smiled at this veiled comment on his assertion. He could afford to, he thought, for just coming out of the mist to leeward was the Volunteer's long-boat, accompanied by two others, all crowded with men.

"Friends and enemies at equal distance," smilingly observed the captain, pointing to the boats to leeward.

"Sure enough, sir!" joyfully assented the first officer, but in a moment his face darkened, and his voice was unusually stern as he ordered: "Lively there with those boarding nettings! The Frenchmen will be aboard, before the others are half way!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DANGER DOUBLES.

CAPTAIN BLOOD looked astonished at Turner's declaration, and the latter explained:

"Our people have been pullin' overloaded boats for four or five mile—ag'in the current, too, I guess—while t' other chaps are startin' out fresh, with the right complement o' men."

A glance at the respective parties proved the correctness of Turner's assertion, and the captain was quick to perceive and prompt to act.

"You are right, Turner!" he exclaimed, and with a look at the arrangements made to receive the visitors, continued:

"Those fellows [the boats from the stranger] do gain on ours, and we must be ready for them."

"Don't fire a gun until there's no chance of wasting a shot! Then use your muskets as fast as you can with certainty!"

"Ay, ay, sir! We'll keep 'em off till our lads get here anyhow!" stoutly assured Turner, who, like all on board, had implicit confidence in the ex-smuggler.

"Bring two of those larboard guns to bear on the boats, and keep them so, but stand ready to meet them astern, and starboard, when they divide!"

"Hang it! They must know we are short-handed!"

"If we had but one of those boat-loads, I'd put springs on the cable—"

A gun from the stranger interrupted the captain, and caused him to glance toward her, and then, seeing the smoke curling from a lee port—which could not reach the Volunteer—toward his long-boat and its companions.

The long-boat was dashing along at a lively rate, carrying a dozen men, now, instead of twenty, and a second glance showed the captain that she was coming on faster than the French, as well as the cause of the gun—the others stopping in a bunch to pick up the men who had jumped from the Volunteer's boat.

"By Jove! That was a good idea, eh, Turner?" cried Captain Blood.

"It was just that, sir! We'll have a dozen more men aboard before they can reach us."

This proved to be the case, the long-boat outstripping all the others—friend and foe—and a dozen brawny fellows, headed by Ned, came on board in time to permit the boarding nettings to be opened and closed before the Frenchmen were close enough to direct fire to be opened on them.

As the crew of the long-boat boarded the Volunteer, cheering from the other boats mingled with the reports of firearms, and a couple of boat-guns, called attention to the fact that two of the stranger's cutters were engaging those coming to the assistance of the schooner, while the former's launch and jolly-boat held on their course.

"Now we've got the fools!" cried Blood, ex-

ultantly. "Begin with solid shot on that launch, Turner! If the fools had come on all together, and divided our fire, we'd have had a lively time holding them off."

"It sart'ly was a foolish caper—but how did our boats get so far t' windward?" returned Turner, as he pointed a gun at the launch.

"Sure enough! The shore boats have run athwart and compelled them to engage! How could they have got there in time?"

Turner made no reply. It was a beautiful day and distance for gun practice; he was desirous of making his mark, and determined to show the captain that he knew how to handle a gun.

"Our people will suffer for their temerity in closing with boats carrying guns," continued the captain, watching the four boats now close together and about a half-cable's length from the Volunteer.

Boom! went Turner's gun, and as the report died away, a cheer arose from those aboard the schooner—cries of agony and curses of rage from the crew of the launch.

Darting a glance in that direction, Blood, who had been watching the opposing bows, shouted:

"Well done, Mr. Turner! Another like that for the jolly-boat!"

"Here, some of ye—any of ye, that can handle a gun—see if ye can disable one of those boats!"

He was walking aft to one of the stern chasers as he spoke, evidently expecting nothing more than assistance in directing the gun, when Frank sprung to his side, saying:

"Our boats have guns, sir, as well as cutlasses and pistols."

Blood stopped a moment—astonished at hearing this—and darting a glance toward the boats, saw the truth of Frank's words. The shore boats were firing the guns, and driving the enemy before them, notwithstanding their overloaded condition, which greatly impeded their movements.

"By Jove, you are right! If we had a breath of air, I'd undertake to board that craft—and take her, too!" muttered Blood, and even as he spoke Turner's gun spoke again.

The first shot had gone through the center of the launch, from bow to stern, tearing away the latter—and the survivors had been taken care of by the jolly-boat.

The latter was the target of Turner's second shot, and again he made a bull's-eye, although the damage was all done to the boat—the shot striking it squarely on the bow, smashing it, and five minutes after the occupants were clinging to the wrecks of the launch and jolly-boat.

A gun now burst from her rigging for a moment—then fell flat for lack of wind to distend it.

"Little need t' call 'em back—they're goin' as fast as the Lord 'll let 'em!" commented Turner, with a grim smile.

Blood's glass remained riveted on the stranger fully a minute longer. Then turning, and looking significantly at Turner, he asked:

"Did ye see that signal long enough to notice it was English?"

"No, sir; wouldn't know it if I did. But, even if she is, we've given her a pretty sharp hint to sheer off. There's no danger of her comin' back for more, I guess?"

"Perhaps not," coolly returned Blood, "but that's no reason we should allow them go unpunished for attempting to board us."

"She's an English man-o'-war brig," he added, "and—with a queer smile—"I think I know her—and her captain, too."

The tone, the expression of Blood's countenance, the words themselves—all combined to cause Turner to stare in incredulous amazement, and the former—in pretended wonder—asked:

"Surely you are not afraid of eighteen guns because Englishmen happen to be behind them?"

"Afraid!" angrily began Turner, but glancing about the decks of the Volunteer, and then at the approaching boats, which had left the English cutters in a sinking condition, quietly replied:

"With the thirty-five or forty men about t' come aboard, an' the twenty-one now with us, I don't see any reason for bein' scared o' anythin'—but you're an Englishman yerself, sir?"

"True—yet no man hates the country worse! Why, sir, I am an outcast—an outlaw—because I dared resent the insults of a titled tyrant—But enough of that! Here are the boats, and the wind with them."

"Ay, ay, sir—an' a fifty-gun English frigate, too, or I'm a Dutchman!"

"Ha! Yes, you are right!" exclaimed Blood.

turning quickly and looking, (as Turner had been,) seaward.

The frigate showed no colors, but to the experienced eyes of those gazing at her there was little doubt of her nationality.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DARING EXPERIMENT.

"YES, 'tis my old friend, the Nymph, without a doubt," continued Blood, after examining the fugitive through his glass. "Curse her, and blast him who commands!" he added, with a sudden and startling access of rage. "I'd give my right arm for the command of the smallest frigate afloat for one hour!"

What he would do during that hour was obvious enough to the wondering Turner, from the expression of hatred with which the speaker watched the rapidly-approaching frigate.

In a few moments—probably recalled to himself by Turner's attention—Blood grew calmer, and quietly ordered:

"We must run for it this time, Turner—and fast, too. Set every rag of canvas that will draw!"

There was no time to be lost. The brig had already set her topsails, while coming right down with the wind, which was rapidly dispersing all traces of the fog, was the frigate, and notwithstanding his wonder, Turner's orders rung out in those sharp, terse sentences which command the confidence of the seaman, and his prompt obedience.

Those on board the Volunteer had been so engaged in watching the fight between the boats, and Turner's sinking of the launch and jolly-boat, that the frigate had come almost within long gunshot range before she was perceived, but in five minutes the beautiful schooner was under way, and out of danger from that quarter.

The dull boom of a heavy gun now came over the water, and the frigate displayed the English ensign.

"That's the lion's roar—now we'll hear from the cub," commented Blood.

Even as he spoke, a cloud of smoke burst from the bows of the brig, and a shot flew across the stern of the Volunteer.

Blood smiled contemptuously, glanced back at the frigate, which, being hopelessly out of range of the light-heeled schooner, was already reducing sail and preparing to heave to, signaling the brig at the same time.

"Follow us in, eh? By heavens, he'll regret it, if he dares!" indignantly exclaimed Blood, reading the signals.

The brig, in obedience to orders, was bearing down to cut off the schooner, but this was not likely to happen, unless the latter should lose some of her more important spars within a very few minutes, for she would then be safe in neutral waters—or rather should be.

Blood, however, had read the order to follow him, and was just in the humor to gratify his pursuer.

"Give that fellow a gun, and hoist our colors!" he ordered, adding:

"See if you can't improve on their gunnery, Mr. Turner—some of the new hands may be able to do it."

"Can't I take a crack at her, cap'n?"

Notwithstanding the title, the tone was decidedly familiar—too much so to suit the man who, since taking command of the Volunteer, had maintained the most rigid discipline, demanding and receiving the most implicit obedience and respect from his former messmates.

"Ha! Who—" fiercely began Blood, turning quickly on the man who had addressed him.

"Beg yer pardon, sir!" interrupted the man, shrinking back, and speaking in an entirely different tone. "I knowed ye hadn't noticed me, an' as ye wor in the waist—"

Blood waved his hand toward the Long Tom, saying:

"That will do, Jason. Sight your gun for his topmasts!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

As the man walked to the gun, the captain turned and inspected his recruits with great interest—almost anxiety. He had hardly looked at them before—satisfied, from their physical appearance as they approached in the boats, that Monsieur Pitou had for once kept faith, in so far that there were neither weaklings nor drunken men among them.

"Smugglers and—by Jove!"

Blood had commenced frowning, but with the last words, the frown vanished, and he called Ned who was standing close to him.

"Send me that thin, small, sickly-looking fel-

low—him in the red cap, leaning on the captain!" he ordered.

Ned obeyed, and the man indicated followed the captain, who walked aft after sending for him.

On reaching the quarter-deck, Blood turned, and addressing the other in a cordial tone, said:

"Glad to see you, Hansen! Most of these are your men?"

"Yes, sir—or rather were," replied Hansen, adding:

"I had to run the lugger ashore, rather than allow them to have her. Your youngsters came in time to catch me, and prevent our going to another in a body."

"Of course, you have noticed there are about twenty of your old comrades among the men who joined?"

"Yes; but, let that go!"

"Hansen, I'm going to fight that brig, and you must act as second lieutenant! You know the men; send them to the guns as you would on the lugger, when I give the order."

"Go forward, now, and pick out your crews quick as possible."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

As the insignificant-looking Hansen saluted and walked forward, Blood called to Turner, and as the latter approached, the report of the Long Tom caused him to look toward the brig.

"Well done, Jason!" he exclaimed, seeing that the shot had carried away the brig's fine foretopmast.

"Now, Turner," he continued, "we're going to give that brig a dose if she comes much further after us. Hansen—that little fellow in the red cap—will act as second lieutenant. He was commander of the fighting smuggler-privateer 'Fox,' and is a very fiend in a fight."

Pausing for a few moments, the speaker took a rapid survey of the situation of the vessels.

"Yes," he continued, "we will try it, now. Keep her away for a few minutes—as if we were going to run along inshore, and stand by to run across her forefoot—to give him a broadside."

The Volunteer was, now, about two miles off the mouth of the Garonne—the shore on either side of which was crowded with spectators, attracted by the firing, and wondering at the singular spectacle.

CHAPTER XV.

A SURPRISE ALL AROUND.

As before stated, the Volunteer was about two miles off the mouth of the Garonne, when, to the astonishment of the spectators, she altered her course as if intending to run along in shore, and many were the expressions of disgust at the stupidity of her commander in not running up the river, where he could lie safe under the guns of the fort.

Delighted at this opportunity of driving the Volunteer off-shore, and into the jaws of the frigate—which, perceiving what was going on, was again under full sail to head off the chase—the commander of the brig came down almost before the wind, but bearing closer, and closer, in-shore.

Apparently, the schooner was nicely trapped—or rather had trapped herself—and the American sympathizers on shore groaned.

Escape seemed impossible. To go on, meant to run right under the guns of the frigate, while to retreat meant a close range broadside from the brig.

As if realizing the hopelessness of the case, the American, notwithstanding the increasing breeze, began reducing sail until the brig was within a half-cable's length of her.

Satisfied that they had the schooner between them, neither the frigate nor the brig had fired a shot from the moment the chase had passed the only avenue of escape—the mouth of the Garonne River—intending to take the prize uninjured.

With the prize almost in his grasp, and still with the intention of taking it unmarred by heavy shot, the commander of the brig ordered his marines forward, and began a heavy fire of musketry to induce her to surrender, but in vain—the schooner held on her course, her men sheltered under the bulwarks.

Oddly enough, too, although still under the same canvas, the Volunteer maintained nearly a cable's length lead of her pursuer, and kept the masts of the latter in one—that is, in a straight line astern.

Fearing the prize would fall to the frigate, and angered at this temerity, the commander of the brig prepared to round to, and pour in a broadside.

"Careful, now, Turner! There—lower away!" ordered Blood, as the brig yawed to with all her sails set.

"Ah! she has surrendered!" was the universal and regretful comment of those on shore, as, in obedience to the order, the main and fore-sails of the Volunteer were in an instant down on deck—the former in almost—apparently in token of submission.

So, too, thought the delighted captain of the brig, for his orders could be distinctly heard on board the schooner:

"Marines cease firing! Hands shorten sail, and clear away the first cutter!"

But the heavy press of sail which the brig was carrying was not to be so quickly reduced as that of the schooner, and as she rounded to she shot past the supposed prize.

A half-minute before, the low order ran from stem to stern of the schooner:

"Ready there, you starboard gunners, and you sail-trimmers! Keep that mainsail up a trifle!"

As the stern of the brig swept by the jib-boom of the schooner, those on the former vessel were amazed to hear:

"Hoist away the jib-sheet! Up that mainsail! Port—hard-a-port! Steady—fire!"

At the first word, Turner had taken the helm, and at the last, uttered as the beautiful schooner wore across the stern of her late pursuer, the starboard battery was poured in.

The range was murderously short, and the six double-shotted guns, in broadside, with the Long Tom's load of grapeshot, wrought terrible havoc—spars, sails, ropes, and men being cut down in heaps.

It was a daring and skillfully executed, though terrible, punishment for a flagrant violation of the law, and as the Volunteer, with all sail set, began to draw away from the crippled brig, Blood leaped to the taffrail, and through his trumpet shouted:

"Next time you undertake to break the law, be sure you can do it with impunity! You deserve another broadside!"

As if confirming his words, a dull roar came murmuring over the water. It was the cheering of the excited spectators, who lined the shore in thousands, and who saluted the Volunteer, when she shortly afterward entered the Garonne, with deafening cheers.

"That was a bright idea of yours, Hansen—engaging the cutters. We might not have had an opportunity to leave her in that state, if you hadn't prevented all four boats from coming at us at once," observed Blood to the second lieutenant (*pro tem.*), as the Volunteer bore away for the river.

"The idea was bright enough," returned Hansen, elevating his eyebrows, "and it ran with inclination, but your youngster is the one entitled to credit for it—not me."

"Eh! Which one?" asked the surprised captain.

"The youngest."

"Ned! Come, Hansen, no joking on the quarter-deck."

"Not at all, sir. I have but stated the fact—it was Ned, as you call him, who directed that your long-boat should be relieved of its overload and then proceed to the schooner, while he and I, with the remaining boats, should attack the enemy's boats."

"To him, also, belongs the credit of forcing two carronades out of that inborn thief, Pitou," added Hansen.

"The deuce he did!" exclaimed the other, in astonishment. "How did he do it?"

"After securing all of my late crew and your former comrades, by using your name, he and the other youngster demanded some money and goods which Pitou had stolen from them."

"He—Pitou—protested innocence, but everybody knew the thief, and son of a thief, was lying, and all joined in promising him a warm bed over his own fire if he delayed in returning what was stolen; but this had restrained the men, though they were rather glad of an excuse to pay off old scores at parting, and it would seem he had an idea of what was coming, for he proposed to allow Pitou time to find the missing money and goods, in exchange for the loan of the carronades."

"To which, of course, the old scoundrel gladly consented?"

"I don't know about that. At all events, nobody asked him; we just took them."

Blood could not forbear smiling at this quiet, simple way of describing what he could well picture—the tumult created by the angry, revengeful seamen; the shivering, thieving, hypocritical landlord; the insignificant-looking but actually all-powerful Hansen taking no active

part, perhaps, though encouraging the men by his non-interference, and the two "youngsters" masters of the situation.

He laughed aloud as he pictured the scene; and then, as the thought occurred to him, asked:

"By the way, you covered a tremendous stretch of water there in a very few minutes after the long-boat left you. How did you manage that? It puzzled me when after seeing you all in company, and a long distance from the brig's boats, to find you engaged with them when I looked again a few minutes afterward."

"That was because one of us happened to mention that there was a strong current setting toward the other boats, and, that there would have to be some stiff pulling, or we'd run in among them. The youngster caught the words, relieved and started your boat to the schooner, while we pulled right in the current to cut off the cutter—which we did."

"It was his idea, and done by his orders—for he was one of your representatives, and claimed to be an officer, so we obeyed him," added Hansen, "and I venture to say that lad will make his mark in the profession he has chosen."

Never did prophet predict more wisely.

"I agree with you," returned Blood, thoughtfully, "he's hot enough to suit a fire-eater—yet he's long-headed where anybody other than himself is concerned. I must look after him."

The Volunteer was now entering the river, and the deafening cheers which greeted her, precluded further conversation.

A pilot came aboard at the mouth of the Garonne, and left her safe under the guns of the castle-fort three miles further up, where Blood, as soon as his beautiful craft was at anchor, went ashore.

"There is no permission, either to go from, or come aboard, this vessel," he said to Turner, and at Hansen.

The former returned the customary "ay, ay, sir!" and the latter bowed, while exchanging a significant look with the captain.

Fully two hours elapsed before Blood returned, during which the Volunteer was besieged by hundreds of admirers, but all were treated alike, and kindly but firmly refused permission to come on board.

As soon as he reached the quarter-deck, the captain summoned all hands aft, and addressed them as follows:

"My lads, you will all be at liberty to go ashore within an hour, if you so choose. Mr. Turner will give each of you a guinea going, and to any of you who expect any of the license usual on board a merchantmen, and sometimes permitted on a privateer—or a smuggler, for instance, I would say—don't come back, for under me you will be treated to the strictest discipline."

"I hope, however, to see you all on board at noon to-morrow. I should not care to part with a single one, for a finer body of seamen never trod a ship's deck. Nevertheless, if not fully prepared to yield implicit obedience, don't come back."

"Mr. Turner! Mr. Hansen! Come with me!"

As the captain ceased, and turned to go below, one of the men called out:

"Any harm t' give three cheers, cap'n? Just t' relieve our feelin's ye know."

"Cheer away!" hastily returned Blood.

"Then here goes—t' the cap'n, lads! Take the time from me!"

The speaker was Jason, the gunner, a prime favorite among his comrades, and the cheers were given with a hearty good will, while Blood stood listening in astonishment.

"Now, three more for the first an' second an' the lad what handled the boats an' brought us here!"

This was done with equal vigor, and the men dispersed in great good humor.

The reference to Ned seemed to recall something to the captain's mind, and, as he again turned to go below, he called out:

"I shall want to talk to you by and by, Preble. Don't go ashore when the men leave!"

"You, too, Horton!" he continued, catching Frank's eye fixed upon him inquiringly, and noting the rather sad expression of that usually cheerful youth's face.

"Now, gentlemen," began the captain, as soon as the others were seated in the cabin, "I am empowered to offer each of you a commission—a French one, of course."

"I have, myself, accepted one by taking command of a 33-gun frigate, and the French were

so pleased with your work this morning that they wish me to retain every man I can, and in such rank as I see fit to place him.

"To you, Mr. Turner, I offer the rank to which I think you are best adapted, and which I've no doubt you prefer—that of master."

"To you, Mr. Hansen, I offer the first lieutenantancy; no man can fill the bill better."

"Now, gentlemen, what is your decision?"

Both officers expressed their thanks, and promptly accepted the proffered commissions.

"Very good! I will go ashore to-morrow and arrange matters. Now, send down Preble."

CHAPTER XVI.

AT THE COMMANDANT'S RECEPTION.

The captain was buried in thought when Ned entered the cabin, but starting up waved the lad to a seat, saying:

"I have a few words to say to you, Ned, regarding yourself and your prospects."

"You did a clever bit of work in cutting off those boats this morning—so clever that the French officials are eager to meet you, and I have promised to bring you ashore this evening."

Ned flushed with delight on hearing this, but it was at the captain's praise, and not, as the latter supposed, at the prospect of meeting the eager French officials.

Mistaking the cause of Ned's quite evident delight, Blood shook his head doubtfully, and warned:

"Don't be carried away by flattery, my lad. It is to put you on your guard against that, that I am now talking to you."

"The French are very polite—effusively so—and to-night you will find yourself quite a hero."

"I have accepted command of a frigate, of which Mr. Hansen will be first officer, and Mr. Turner master. These are my own selections, and I might choose the other lieutenants from the ship's company, were there men capable of filling the vacancies, but there are none, and the Government must supply the two officers."

The captain paused a moment—like one who has something disagreeable to say, and then continued:

"So far, everything is perfectly satisfactory to me; but these Frenchmen are erratic devils, and unfortunately (in response to their inquiries) I dilated a little too much on the value of your really long-headed work this morning."

"And, what do you think is the result?"

Full of wonder at all this explanatory talk, from one who seldom deigned to explain anything, Ned made no response other than a negative shake of the head.

"Why, they want to make you something extraordinary—a wonder—by appointing you a junior lieutenant—the fourth of the frigate I am to command!"

"Of course, it's all nonsense," continued Blood, noting Ned's amazement, with an approving nod. "You are entirely unfitted for the position, and it would not only make you a laughing stock, but prevent you from ever properly acquiring the knowledge necessary to fit you for that rank. Still the Frenchmen insisted against my protests that the question should be laid before you to-morrow, and you will probably hear something of it to-night."

"It sounds very nice to be made a lieutenant; but, as you say, sir, it would be nonsensical when applied to me," remarked Ned, when the captain paused to note the effect of his words.

"That's the talk!" exclaimed the latter, looking greatly relieved. "That's the talk! Stick to that to-night, and they'll understand you are not to be made a monkey—a toy for the satisfaction of their caprice."

"Indeed," continued Blood in a thoughtful tone, "it would be wise not to accept any offer; but, never mind; I'll arrange that."

"I am going to place Horton's name before them for a midshipman's commission, and you may accept the same appointment. When we arrive in American waters, your father must decide whether you will continue in the service."

"I am glad you have shown yourself so sensible. Get ready to accompany me, and send down Horton."

Ned left the cabin in quite an excited state of mind, and informing Harry that he was wanted by the captain, went to prepare for his visit ashore.

We must pass over the grand reception to which Ned accompanied Blood that evening, and the attentions paid to both while there, contenting ourselves with saying that, but for the warning he had received, the former certainly would have surrendered to the flattering influences brought to bear upon him.

When the people began to leave, Ned sought the captain, (from whom he had been kept separated almost all the night, and found him surrounded by a knot of officers.

"Fine feathers may not make fine birds," thought Ned, commenting on the difference between the appearance of Blood the smuggler, and Blood the captain, "but, they do seem to help in making the bird look better."

He was slowly approaching the group, admiring the fine appearance of his captain, when, suddenly, the latter, (who was listening attentively to the remarks of a white-haired army officer,) started, and stared at a lady who was passing, like one who had received a great shock.

The object of the captain's attention was a beautiful woman of about twenty-five, who passed through the crowd, escorted by the commandant, as if unaware of the presence of any one except her gallant companion.

"Who is the lady with the commandant?" Ned inquired of a young Frenchman to whom he had been introduced.

"Ah! It is easy to see you are a stranger," smilingly replied the other, "otherwise you would know the beautiful Mademoiselle Elrington."

"She is indeed beautiful," commented Ned.

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders, and laughed.

"So is that statue," he said; "and, were you older, I would warn you against falling in love with her, for one would be as likely to respond to your passion as the other. She is beautiful, magnificent—but an iceberg—and as dangerous."

"English isn't she?" asked Ned.

"Yes; the daughter of General Elrington—a great friend of the commandant, although they have opposed each other on many a hard fought field."

"Thank you for the warning you gave me a moment ago, though, as you intimated, there is no need of it. The fact that the lady is English would be sufficient."

The Frenchman laughed heartily at this display of patriotism, and shook his head doubtfully.

"Patriotism is all right until opposed to love," he began, but was stopped by loud talking at the other end of the long room. Then, like lightning flashes, came the sounds of blows, a heavy fall, a scream, and a cry of "Fire!"

With the first words of the noisy talk, Ned had darted away from his companion, for he had seen that Blood was one of those engaged in the altercation, and, as he rushed forward, caught the words:

"A deserter from the English service, and a murderous scoundrel—"

It was Blood's opponent who was talking; but at that point he ceased, further utterance being choked by several of his teeth, which a blow from the fist of the powerful ex-smuggler set rattling in the speaker's mouth.

The loud talk had gathered the crowd so thickly around the excited men, as to prevent the man from falling, but the people fell back, and a lady was crushed into a corner against a lighted taper. Then came the cry of "Fire!"

Ned had seen all that occurred, and as he rushed through the crowd, snatched a wrap from the shoulders of a lady, who was too excited to notice her loss, and a moment after, was tearing off the gauzy fabric which formed the dress of Miss Elrington! It had taken fire in several places, but the material underneath was heavy, and was barely scorched—except one sleeve—when the excited youth began his destructive, yet saving work.

Throwing the borrowed wrap across the shoulders of the burning woman, and drawing its folds around her so as to inclose the burning sleeve, Ned held it tight with one hand while with the other he tore off the burning dress.

This was quickly accomplished, but not until Ned's right hand was severely burnt; then the fabric underneath began to burn.

There was a large skin lying underneath the stand from which the taper had fallen, and seeing this Ned shouted:

"Quick, with that skin! Quick, confound you!"

Not very polite, it is true, but it needed something forcible to arouse the terrified spectators, who appeared to be unable to do anything more than utter senseless shouts and cries, and run hither and thither, each directing the others to do something, but none doing anything.

The whole affair had occupied only two or three minutes, and was ended when Ned shouted for the skin.

"Out of the way!" roared Blood, bursting through the crowd; and, snatching up the skin wrapped it around Miss Elrington, who was already half unconscious from fright, and promptly became wholly so when he picked her up.

"Go ahead, and find some of the servants who haven't gone quite mad! Quick, my lad!" directed Blood.

Angry at their failure to assist him, and smarting with pain, Ned's method of making way through the excited crowd was, like his recent language, more forcible than polite; but it was very effective.

Just as he reached the door, closely followed by Blood, the commandant made his appearance, calm, but anxious looking, through the exaggerated report of a servant.

"This way," he directed, instantly guessing the truth, and led the way to his wife's apartment, dispatching a servant for a physician while on the way.

"Of the two, the rescuer came off second best," reported the physician, coming from Miss Elrington, to dress Ned's burnt hand.

"She escaped with a blistered arm, that will be healed long before this poor hand—the hand that probably saved her life," he added.

"No, no! It was Captain Blood who saved her life!" protested Ned. "The really dangerous fire was beginning to burn, when he came."

But nobody took any notice of the protest—especially as the captain himself laughed at it.

"He had better remain here to-night, and retire to rest at once," decided the physician.

"Very well, if you think it necessary," hesitatingly returned Blood.

"I do. The hand is severely burnt, and it will be better not to permit him to get more excited than he now is."

Accordingly Ned went to bed, and dreamt of a burning iceberg, which suddenly melted into a beautiful woman.

CHAPTER XVII.

MIXED UP IN MYSTERY.

DOCTOR RAMSEY, the physician, was a Scotchman. He had made certain that Ned should sleep by dropping a pinch of morphine into the drink which the latter took before retiring, and it was late, therefore, when he opened his eyes.

Ned had recovered consciousness full of his dream, (which, by the way, had ended with the marriage of the beautiful iceberg woman and Captain Blood!) and could hardly believe himself awake when he found the beautiful woman leaning over him, looking at his burnt hand.

"Ah! You have caught me!" exclaimed Miss Elrington, smiling as she saw that Ned's admiring eyes were open and fixed upon her.

"Yes," he admitted. "but I knew you were there."

He still was full of his dream, and certainly not more than awake—drugs at night are not apt to enliven one's wits in the morning.

"Why, how could you know I was here?" asked the astonished lady.

This brought Ned to his senses, and with an embarrassed laugh, he explained:

"I'm afraid I was mixing my dream with the reality."

"Then you were dreaming of me, were you?" asked Miss Elrington, much interested.

"Oh, yes—of you and the captain. He saved you from being burnt, you know."

"Why, no; you must be dreaming yet. 'Twas you who saved me from being burnt," laughingly protested Miss Elrington.

"By no means!" eagerly protested Ned, glad of the opportunity to set things right, from his standpoint. "By no means, Miss Elrington! I managed to put out the gauze, but the heavy linen was beginning to burn when Captain Blood wrapped you in the skin."

"Captain Blood! What Captain Blood?"

Miss Elrington looked strangely agitated as she asked the question.

"Not much iceberg about her, now?" mentally commented Ned, and aloud:

"Don't know that I can tell you that, Miss Elrington; but I'm pretty sure he knows you."

"Why—why do you think so?"—with feverish eagerness.

"Well, I don't think it; I feel sure of it, because he looked as if he had seen a ghost when you passed through the room last night, and there isn't anything else human that could do what the mere sight of you did."

"Gracious Heaven! It seemed a dream! Still, it was his face I saw last night. Yes, yes—'twas George—poor George!"

She seemed oblivious of Ned's presence, and was buried in thought—sad thought from the

expression of her countenance—for several minutes when, without the least warning, Blood entered the room!

For a moment, he remained just inside the door, unperceived, but too astonished to take advantage of the opportunity to retire without being seen, before he turned to go. It was too late, however, for the movement—something—attracted Miss Elrington's attention.

"George!" she shrieked, and would have fallen, had not Blood sprung and caught her.

With a bitter objurgation on the carelessness of the servant who had informed him that Ned was alone, Blood placed Miss Elrington in an easy-chair beside Ned's bed.

The ex-smuggler was laboring under great excitement, and his voice was thick as he almost whispered:

"Ned, you must leave here as soon as this lady is removed. I will send some of the servants immediately. Hurry away without saying anything to any one, unless you wish to be left behind!"

He was gone with the last word, leaving Ned fairly paralyzed with astonishment, from which he had not recovered when a couple servants entered and removed Miss Elrington.

This reminded Ned of what he had to do, unless he "wished to be left behind;" and although bewildered by the words, he jumped out of bed.

"Secrecy seems necessary, so I must be careful," muttered the "patient," when he had managed to complete dressing, and, cautiously opening his door, listened.

Nothing was heard; no one moving, or talking on that floor; but above there was noise enough to make up for the silence below.

"Attending Miss Elrington," commented Ned, and moving quietly, the Yankee boy passed out of the commandant's house without meeting any one.

Just outside the entrance he met Frank, who immediately turned and walked toward the river until they reached a little *cafe*, which the latter entered.

"What's all this mystery about?" asked Ned, who had followed a short distance behind his friend, wondering at this new turn of affairs.

"Wait a bit. Sit down," replied Harry, and to the waiter who approached:

"A bottle of your best claret."

"We are going to sail to-night," he continued, as soon as the waiter was out of hearing, "and you and I are to meet the schooner at the mouth of the river about midnight."

"In a little while we will leave this hole, hire a boat, and go down the river."

"Why, what has happened?" asked Ned, more and more astonished.

"Don't ask me, for I know nothing. The captain came aboard a short time before you saw me and bade me wait for you, do as I've told you, and say what I've said."

Ned emitted an expressive whistle, and Harry nodded grave assent, as the waiter placed the wine before them.

Nothing more passed between the lads until they quitted the *cafe* for the water front, where a boat was engaged—the owner of which, recognizing them as part of the Volunteer's crew, refused to accept any security.

"All right—and many thanks to you," said Harry, and drawing a guinea from his pocket, continued:

"I've an equally good opinion of you, so, if you'll take care of this for me, I'll be obliged. I'm afraid it would be spent before we get back."

The Frenchman grinned as he took the money, little dreaming of the true meaning of the "eccentric American."

"What the deuce did you do that for?" asked Ned, as they pulled out into the stream.

"Why, to pay for the boat, or rather the recovery of it, of course."

"Hello! Don't look 'round! Be as deaf as an adder!" continued Frank bending to the oars, and keeping his eyes in the boat.

"It's one of the commandant's servants," he explained, as the voice of a man on shore, hailing in French and English, reached them.

No attention was paid to the man's cries, Ned, steering, kept looking straight ahead, while Frank, bending over the oars, was too busy to heed them, and soon the boat was out of earshot.

"It's all right; he's given up," said Frank, seeing the man turn away in disgust. "They'll think you've stolen away for a day's fun, and won't suspect the truth until it's too late."

This proved to be the case. The servant was sworn at by the doctor for not following the boys in another boat, and that ended the matter for the day.

Shortly after the unsuccessful messenger's return, the commandant received an invitation to dine on board the Volunteer that evening, which was promptly accepted because of a line at the bottom:

"I have something to say in explanation of last night's fracas."

The commandant admired Blood, but he did not like "a deserter from the British service, and a murderous scoundrel," and was really anxious to hear the explanation.

Long before the appointed time, it was pretty generally known in military circles that, notwithstanding the occurrence of the previous night, the commandant was going to dine with Captain Blood.

During the afternoon, the French authorities received a request to arrest "St. George Blood Howard, formerly a lieutenant in Her Britannic Majesty's service, a deserter, and murderer of Lieutenant George Elrington."

This was a very serious charge against the man who had been honored by the commander of a fine frigate, but the very fact that he had been so honored, as well as the promptitude with which the accusation had been resented the previous night in their presence, made the French officials cautious about acting upon the request of the English consul.

Shortly after this startling information was received, came the news that the commandant was going to dine with the accused, and there was a general feeling of relief.

"Bah! It is jealousy!" exclaimed one of the officials.

"More than that—revenge for the way the English were beaten yesterday," said another, adding:

"We will await a report from the commandant. Be assured we shall hear something different from him. He is not the man to dine with a murderer."

This speech met with a murmur of approval, and, therefore, when, (after the commandant was on board,) the Volunteer lifted her anchor and dropped down the river, no attempt was made to bar her progress.

"Merely a little excursion—they will not go beyond the boundary," asserted the gentleman who had vouched for the commandant.

This was quickly confirmed by a report that the Volunteer was anchored at the mouth of the Garonne, right under the guns of a French seventy-four; but, when morning came the schooner was missing! So was the commandant!

For several hours there was great excitement throughout the city, which became intensified by the arrival of the commandant in a fishing smack.

The latter had a long interview with the civil and military officials, after which the British consul, who had been clamoring for information, was informed that the schooner had escaped through kidnapping the commandant;—and that was all the satisfaction he received.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CAPTAIN'S COUP.

A WEEK after the nocturnal flight of the Volunteer, his Britannic Majesty's man-of-war big Rattlesnake dropped anchor off the mouth of the River Garonne, and her first lieutenant went ashore.

The Rattlesnake looked like the brig which had received so severe, though deserved, a punishment from the Volunteer, but the French authorities were not inclined to be inquisitive, especially as the English representative had been in a particularly ugly mood ever since the escape of Blood—or, as he was described in the request to seize him, St. George Blood Howard.

Personally, the consul "didn't care two straws" about Blood's escape, but he was being pushed by one whose influence carried considerable weight at the Foreign Office in London, and he, as well as his assistants, breathed a sigh of relief when it was announced that the Rattlesnake was in the offing.

"Thank Heaven! Now, if her commander will only see fit to join his ship, we shall have some peace," muttered the consul.

"Gracious! Here he comes again!" continued the harassed official, as he heard an authoritative voice in the outer office inquiring if he was within.

A moment later a clerk entered to announce "Sir Henry Wilson," but without awaiting permission, the gentleman himself entered.

He was the man who had accused Blood of being a deserter and a murderer, and was the commander of the Rattlesnake.

The descendant of a wealthy and influential family, Sir Henry Wilson had little hope of inheriting the title until over thirty years of age.

Then the death of two persons, standing between him and the title, rendered the heretofore unknown lieutenant a person of some importance, and he quickly became a captain, being given command of a fine frigate—the one which had assisted in the attempted capture of the Volunteer.

On succeeding to the title, Sir Henry retired from active service for several years, but a life of dissipation had undermined his health, and being warned by his physician that this must be stopped, he decided to return to sea, for awhile.

It was thoroughly understood that Sir Henry's return was only temporary—a mere pleasure cruise; so the admiral recommended the beautiful and fast-sailing Rattlesnake, which the former was pleased to accept.

The consul greeted his visitor as cordially as if he did not detest the very sight of him, and before the former had an opportunity to begin his daily tirade, asked:

"Have you heard that the Rattlesnake is reported as being in the offing, Sir Henry?"

"Indeed! Well, I'm happy to hear it. Anything to get out of this cursed hole!"

Dentistry, then, was not the fine art it now is, and the speaker's mouth still bore the traces of Blood's handiwork, to the secret satisfaction of the consul, who believed that was the real cause of his anxiety to get out of Bordeaux.

"Officer from the Rattlesnake, with letters for Sir Henry Wilson!" announced a clerk at this point, and the first lieutenant of the brig entered.

"Return to the ship immediately!" ordered the captain, after glancing at the letters. "Have my steward arrange for the accommodation of two passengers. General Elrington and his daughter, will accompany us to England."

"If you are in need of stores, get them at once, and let there be no dallying on shore while doing so."

"Afraid they'll hear how he lost the teeth," was the comment of the consul, as the first lieutenant retired.

Leaving the consul's office, Sir Henry hurried to the commandant's residence where he met General Elrington and his daughter about to go out for a drive; but his announcement that the Rattlesnake was ordered home immediately caused them to remain, and prepare for their departure.

"Better see about having your things packed, at once, Alice," suggested the general, who knew no crime greater than delay in obeying an official order.

"And, now, general, about Alice," began Wilson, as soon as they were alone, revealing the cause of the lie he had told regarding the necessity for immediate departure.

"My dear fellow," interrupted the general, "as I have told you before, talking to me is throwing away time—utterly useless. Talk to Alice—but take my advice, and wait until we get to England."

"But she will not listen to me—appears to have taken a dislike to me, since that sad, unfortunate—"

"That will do, that will do!" again, and more hastily interrupted General Elrington.

Miss Elrington returned to the room at that moment, and noticing her father's agitation, looked sharply at the visitor—and in a by no means pleasant manner, as if she suspected the cause.

Wilson felt uneasy under the fire of the lady's eyes, and left in the course of a few moments, on the plea of making preparations for the reception of his guests.

That night General Elrington and his daughter went on board the Rattlesnake, (which could just as well waited a week for them,) and thus took the first step in a short, but exceedingly eventful journey—one which changed the current of the lives of all concerned.

An hour later, a schooner came to anchor about a couple miles below the city, and shortly after a boat put off for the shore.

"Hurry along, my lads, and be careful," urged a man in the stern sheets of the boat, addressing two youths who had disembarked—Ned Preble, and Frank Horton!

An hour elapsed before the youths returned to the boat, which pulled quickly to the Volunteer, on the deck of which stood Blood, anxiously awaiting them.

"Ah!" Although he must have felt pretty certain of the safety of the party, (since they were provided with rockets in case of trouble,) an immense relief was expressed in the exclamation with which

the captain greeted the Yankee boy's appearance on the quarter-deck.

"Come below," he continued, and, on reaching the cabin, turned and uttered another monosyllable:

"Well?"

"Gone, sir! General Elrington and his daughter sailed to-day for England!"

Ned drew a letter from his pocket as he finished, and handed it to Blood. The latter with a melancholy smile, threw it on the table, saying:

"So ends all my hopes."

"I learned something else," said Ned, anxious to divert the thoughts of the captain. "The Rattlesnake's just off the Garonne."

"Ha! That's interesting!" exclaimed Blood, his eyes brightening at the thought of their last meeting, and his brain already busy with a new scheme.

"She is to sail to-morrow," continued Ned. "I saw her commander coming ashore in his barge and inquired who he was;—that's how I learned it."

"And your informant told you—?"

"That he was the commander of the Rattlesnake—Sir Harry Wilson."

"What? Wilson in command of the brig? Impossible!"

"No, sir. I heard a gentleman who was with him address him by that title."

"Then, by the Eternal, we'll meet our friend, Sir Henry, where he will not have a frigate at his back!" said Blood.

"You've done well, very well, Ned! Send down Mr. Hansen, and tell Mr. Turner to turn up the hands."

CHAPTER XIX.

A SUGGESTIVE MANEUVER.

ALTHOUGH by no means anxious to start, now that he had the fair Alice where she could not avoid him, Captain Wilson was compelled to keep up appearance before the old general, and the brig lifted her anchor at noon next day.

As the Rattlesnake was got under way, the first officer observed a similar movement on board a vessel lying about three miles to the southward.

"Looks uncommonly like that confounded Yankee privateer," he muttered, after studying the stranger through his glass, but, there was too much to attend to, at the moment, to lose any time in useless speculation.

"For, even if it should be the Yankee, he's in too much of a hurry to get home with that lady of his—or to be his—to waste time in a chase."

So thought the lieutenant, and rightly, too. Captain Wilson had concluded to follow General Elrington's advice, and avoid any expression or exhibition of his passion until they had arrived in England, and while in no great hurry to get there, would not think of engaging, much less chasing, an enemy, where he could avoid it.

Of course, the stranger was the Volunteer and yet not the same vessel—in appearance—that had so cleverly punished the Rattlesnake.

Then, she was a schooner—now she was a brigantine, flying French colors.

In the foretop of the Volunteer was Ned, glass in hand, watching, and every now and then, reporting, the movements of the Rattlesnake, and when the latter vessel was fairly under way, the Volunteer, too, began to glide through the water.

Usually, there were three or four English frigates lying off the Cordovan Light, but as far as the glass could reach, none were to be seen in any direction, and a grim smile played around Blood's mouth, when Ned descended to the deck, and so reported.

"Now, it will be each tub on its own bottom, and one of them to the bottom!" he exclaimed, fiercely.

"Don't run too close yet awhile," he continued, addressing Turner. "Let him get well out, before you attempt to reduce the distance—say about the first dog watch."

"Mr. Hansen, you will see to it that everything is in readiness to begin, at that time."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

The captain went below, and remained in the cabin—whether asleep or awake, nobody knew—until four o'clock, when the boatswain's whistle summoned the watch below, and then he returned to the deck.

The Volunteer was now about three miles astern and to windward of the Rattlesnake, and Ned—who was again in the foretop—was about to descend, when the fluttering skirt of a

woman on the quarter-deck of the brig caught his eye.

Startled not a little by this unexpected discovery, the sharp-eyed youth resumed his watch on the brig for a few minutes, but without again seeing either the skirt or its owner, and when summoned to the deck by the first lieutenant, he descended in a very perplexed state of mind.

Ned was a quick-witted lad, and his brain was busy as he slowly descended the rigging.

As his foot touched the first spoke of the Jacob's ladder, an inkling of the truth flashed upon him, and going to the captain, he began:

"I'm afraid, sir, there was some mistake in the information I gathered last night regarding Miss Elrington."

"What do you mean, sir?" sharply demanded Blood.

"That the servant who told me Miss Elrington sailed yesterday was either mistaken herself, or purposely misled me."

"And what do you mean by that?"

"Just this, sir: Miss Elrington's father is an English general, the Rattlesnake's an English man-o'-war brig, and I've seen a woman's dress fluttering on the quarter-deck of the brig!"

"It's against the rules, I believe, for officers to carry their wives," added Ned, significantly.

"By heavens, the lad's right!" cried Blood, as Ned's meaning flashed upon him.

"Are you positive? Did you see the lady?"

"No, sir, I did not make her out. It was only a few minutes ago that I noticed the fluttering of a light dress, just as I was about to come down from the cross-trees. I looked again, and kept watching until called down, but it was gone."

"Sure you're not mistaken about seeing it at all? Be careful, my lad; it will make no little difference in my mode of attack."

"I am positive, sir, that there is one woman, at least, on the brig," was the firm reply.

Blood placed great reliance in Ned, and for a few moments his countenance expressed the perplexity he felt. Then his face cleared, and he called to Hansen:

"I've changed my mind. Beat the 'retreat from quarters'!"

Five minutes before, he had himself ordered the drummer to "beat to quarters," remarking, with a grim smile:

"We'll open with his favorite game of long balls. Keep your weather-eye open, Mr. Turner, to avoid the return of our compliments."

"Begin as soon as we're within range, Mr. Hansen!"

"An English sovereign for every shot that hits an English spar!"

The crew, now numbering over one hundred men, cheered heartily on hearing this, and looked and felt all the more gloomy, when the first lieutenant, without showing the slightest surprise, ordered the drummer beat the "retreat."

The unmoved manner in which Hansen received, and issued, the order, deceived the men into supposing he was aware of the cause of the sudden change; but he was, in fact, more astonished than any other man on board.

Blood had watched the effect of the order on both officers and crew, and noted Hansen's calm demeanor with an approving smile. Then, after the men had dispersed, he summoned the lieutenant to the cabin, directing Turner, now master, to maintain the same distance between the vessels.

While the captain and lieutenant were below, the sky became overcast and fearing a hurricane, Turner was about to send Ned to acquaint the captain of the change, when the latter, with Hansen, returned to the deck.

"Yes, it looks a little threatening," he carelessly assented, when Turner spoke of the necessity of preparing for a squall, at least.

"Hadn't we better get in shape to meet it, sir?" persisted the master.

For a moment Blood frowned—criticisms, questions and suggestions relative to anything he might do, or say (unless invited) were strictly forbidden, but seeing it was love for the vessel that impelled the question—which was perfectly proper—he answered:

"Yes, you may make such preparations as are necessary, or rather get ready to do so, for we must hold on to the last minute, in order to get within range before the light leaves us."

"Surely you're not going to begin—"

Turner stopped short in time, and turning to the sail-trimmers and top-men, sent them to their stations, ready at the word to strip the slender, tapering spars of the beautiful brigantine.

The voice of Hansen, meanwhile, was heard forward, directing the clearing away of the two bow-chasers which the Volunteer now carried, while Blood stood on the quarter deck watching over all—one part of the crew preparing to meet the attack of the elements—the other part to attack the enemy.

CHAPTER XX.

MORE OF THE CONSEQUENCES.

THAT the ominous signs of the impending storm—the dark, threatening mass of vapor in the west (which was blending the ocean with the sky in a direction opposed to the currents of air) had not escaped the attention of those in charge of the Rattlesnake was soon apparent.

"He is sending down all his light masts," muttered the master, and thinking this might induce Blood to do the same, repeated those words to the latter.

"Yes—I saw that some time ago," calmly returned the captain, and to Hansen:

"I think we have her in range now, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good. Fire as we rise on the crest of the waves, for it's her spars we want down when this blows over."

"The fool is expecting a hurricane, and he will not be disappointed—but it will be of fire, to which this squall will be child's play."

This was partly a shot at Turner, to whom Blood now turned.

"Now, sir, place us on the quarter of the brig, and you may make any preparations you please for the squall."

"Keep the weather gauge at all hazards; and, if possible, remain just in the angle which will be equally safe from his broadsides, and difficult for any temporary gun to touch from his cabin windows."

"As far as maneuvering goes, the brigantine is in your hands for the present."

"Thank ye, sir," returned Turner, hurrying aft, for the captain was now on the fore-castle with Hansen, looking after the guns, and in less time than it takes to record it, the work of preparing the volunteer for the impending blast was under way and almost completed.

For the previous half hour, the wind had been light and variable, which favored the brigantine, and enabled her to gain almost the desired position before the captain spoke.

A strong sweeping gust now heralded the near approach of the storm, which burst a few minutes later with a crash, to which the explosion of fifty pieces of artillery would have sounded feeble. It was no time for man to war against man. The powers of heaven were loose, and in all their fury. The wind howled, the sea raged, the thunder stunned, and the lightning blinded.

But, amid all, Blood was unawed, unmoved, unchecked, and the moment the Volunteer gained a position on the enemy's quarter, began firing, himself directing the first shot.

The brig and brigantine were now within half-gunshot range, but, under such circumstances, it was, of course, mere chance that caused the first shot fired to carry away the mainmast of the former.

The loss of the spar was at first attributed to the storm (though it seemed unaccountable) for the report of the gun was lost in the roar of the elements, but as another, and still another, spar followed, the people of the brig quickly concluded that the craft riding on their quarter was not there by accident.

"Yes, by the gods of war! She is firing on us! I saw the flash of the gun!" cried the first lieutenant of the brig, who was in charge of the vessel, Captain Wilson being below with his alarmed guests.

As the lieutenant finished speaking, and turned to notify the captain, a sheet of flame burst from the lee-bow port of the brigantine.

The shot struck the mainmast rather low down; splinters flew in every direction, and one of them stretched the lieutenant on the deck, senseless.

As a brig carries but two lieutenants, and the second was rather young and inexperienced, all was confusion when Captain Wilson appeared on deck, having been informed of what had occurred by a frightened midddy.

Whatever else he might be, the English captain was a well-trained seaman, and quickly restored order; but, try as he would, he could not—at all events while the squall lasted—bring a gun to bear on the brigantine.

The latter continued to fire shot after shot, and shortly after the captain came on deck, the Rattlesnake's wounded mainmast fell over the side, while a shower of splinters was knocked out of the foremast at almost the same moment,

injuring (though not seriously) both the captain and his remaining lieutenant, as well as many others.

The strife of the elements was now abating, but neither the officers nor the crew of the Rattlesnake, nor the vessel itself, were in condition to take advantage of it, and Blood seemed almost disappointed when he observed this.

"It's all up with them," he said to Hansen. "We could lie off here and riddle her, but that, as you know, is not my object. Get your boarders ready!"

"Mr. Turner! Put us across her stern—one raking—then close!"

"Use grape and canister, Mr. Hansen, and the fore-castle and quarter-deck guns only!"

"Lively, now, my lads—make short work of it!"

These orders were quickly obeyed, and seeing the impossibility of avoiding being raked, and not knowing that the consequent destruction would be confined to his upper deck, and those on it, Captain Wilson was about to lower his flag when he recognized Blood standing on the fore-castle of the Volunteer, sword in hand, at the head of a party of boarders.

"Never! Never, by the living God! I'll sink her first!" he cried; and, addressing his crew with desperate energy, continued:

"My lads! that flag will never be lowered to a deserter!"

He was still proclaiming the lie that cost him teeth, but it was only half believed by his own crew.

"Pikes and cutlasses! All hands to repel boarders!"

As he finished, the brigantine glided across the stern of her helpless adversary, pouring in a murderous discharge of grape and canister in passing, and, wearing round, ran alongside—her boarders headed by Blood and Hansen, leaping on the brig fore and aft.

Blood was the first to touch the deck, and slipping in a pool of blood, fell on his hands and knees. He was up in a moment, but it came near being his last, for, as he arose Wilson was springing at him, sword in hand.

In direct violation of his orders, Ned, unable to resist the impulse, had followed close on the heels of his captain, and as Wilson was about to run the latter through, his sword was knocked upward, and almost out of his grasp, by the young privateersman's cutlass.

This gave Blood all the opportunity needed, and, the next instant, the two captains stood facing each other, sword in hand, thirsting for each other's blood.

Both were perfect masters of the fence, and for a few minutes the honors were even. A few minutes later the crews of both ships—the Rattlesnake's men having surrendered—coming from every direction, were watching the combat, which lasted fully ten minutes before either received a scratch.

The presence of his men among the crew of the Volunteer, the cessation of the firing and all other noises, the men hanging in the rigging of the vessel alongside, all combined to make Captain Wilson aware of the surrender of the Rattlesnake, and he fought to kill, careless of the consequences to himself.

Watching his opportunity, the now doubly desperate man, instead of warding off, accepted the point of Blood's blade through his arm, and shortening his own lunged at the same moment.

He aimed at the heart, but only grazed Blood's ribs—an effort to withdraw his sword saving the latter's life.

A piercing shriek startled the spectators of this strange duel as Wilson's sword protruded through Blood's clothing, and all turned in the direction of the cabin, whence the sound came—all except Blood, who jerked his sword free, as Wilson turned his head.

On the quarter deck stood General Elrington supporting his daughter. Deceived by the cessation of the noise of the conflict, they had come on deck, and seeing the men gathered aft, and hearing the clash of steel, had gone on the quarter-deck to obtain a better view of what was going on, in time to see Wilson's blade pass, apparently, through Blood's side.

"Ha! Not dead yet!" cried Wilson, recalled by the movement which released his opponent's sword, and his own at the same time.

He fully understood the scene on the quarter-deck, and it was unfortunate for him that he did.

Enraged, maddened by the thought that it was because of the danger of one whom he had done all that jealousy and hatred could suggest to ruin, that the woman he had sought so long to win had fainted, Wilson threw prudence to the winds, and rushed blindly at his antagonist.

Springing to one side, Blood, firm as a rock, met the rush with his sword-point, which passed clear through Wilson's body!

It was a mortal wound, as the surgeon of the Rattlesnake quickly declared, but Wilson was satisfied; his enemy would accompany him to the other world, he thought, and that was all he cared about.

"You will not live long to enjoy your triumph, much as she is interested in you," he said to Blood, who was seated on a gun, pale and almost overcome by loss of blood and the conflicting emotions raging within him.

Blood paid no attention to the dying man's words, and mistaking the reason, the latter continued:

"'Twas my work—I who spread the report that caused the quarrel between you and her brother; and when I had goaded you into firing at me, my work was accomplished; but you accidentally went further than I possibly could have gone, for your shot struck her brother. Then, you were ruined, for, except myself, no one suspected the shot was accidental, and you may be sure I made no effort to correct the mistake."

"You miserable wretch! Is this the truth?" excitedly demanded General Elrington, bursting through the crowd.

"It is; but it's too late to do him any good, or you would never have heard it," replied Wilson, glancing malignantly at the motionless man on the gun.

"He was young, handsome, wealthy, and—a Howard. Why should he come between me and the woman I loved? He had all the London beauties begging attention to their charms, while I was devoting myself to one—one who in time would have loved me, had he not come between us. But he has paid for it—paid most bitterly!"

Wilson had spoken strongly and rapidly, very unlike the feeble utterance of one on the verge of eternity, but it was his intense hatred that lent him false strength, and, when he ceased, his lips were closed, for he never spoke again.

Turning from the dead to the living, General Elrington asked:

"Are you badly hurt, Howard?"

"No," was the dull response.

"Come, come! Rouse up, man! Alice supposes you dead, and, if only to relieve her, pull yourself together and follow me to the cabin. I will prepare her for your coming."

As the general uttered these low-spoken words, the face of the other brightened visibly, and accepting the hand which had been all along held out to him, he murmured:

"Thank you; I'll go."

CHAPTER XXI.

A HAPPY DENOUEMENT.

CAPTAIN BLOOD, as we still will call him, entered the cabin of the Rattlesnake, but returned to the cabin a half-hour later, with sparkling eyes and smiling face.

"Here, Ned! You are wanted in the cabin of the brig!" he called out, on stepping aboard the Volunteer.

Ned guessed by whom he was wanted, and smiled, then looked ruefully at his soiled clothes.

"Never mind your appearance!" urged Blood. "She wants to thank you for saving my life."

"Set the men—both crews—cleaning up and repairing," he continued, turning to Hansen, who had followed him from the brig.

"They are already washing down decks, sir, and will begin knotting and splicing as soon as that's done. There are plenty of spare spars, and as all the damage is above decks, we can have her in readiness to sail before night."

"Very good! I'm glad to hear it! Go ahead, Ned! Come below, Mr. Hansen!"

"That brig must be permitted to proceed to England," declared Blood, on reaching the cabin.

"So I expected," coolly returned Hansen.

"Eh? You expected that?"

"After the scene on the brig, I did—as does every one else."

"And the crew: will they not feel sore over the disappointment?"

"Let them, if they will; but I do not think so. Every man-jack of them is as deeply interested in your affair with the la—ahem—with the dead man and the old gentleman, as if it were his own affair."

"Much obliged to them, I'm sure," laughed Blood, adding:

"Take out everything of value, not necessary to the safety of the vessel. She is well sup-

plied with arms and ammunition and her battery is a pretty one, so the Volunteer's crew will go away altogether empty-handed."

"Do you go with the brig?" quietly asked Hansen.

"Oh, no! The brig's people—you understand—will come to me, in America, within a couple of months."

"I'm glad. I feared it would be the other way."

"Thank you! You're a good fellow, Hansen!" averred Blood, grasping the lieutenant's hand.

"And, now, if you please, I'll get back to my work, and quietly let the men know what they already suspect regarding the disposition to be made of the brig, is correct."

"Do so. If there is any discontent let me know, and I will do my best to remedy it."

"There will be none," assured Hansen; and he was right. There was not the slightest discontent over the loss of prize money, and when the vessels parted company, next morning, the greatest good feeling existed between the crews of both.

Ned was one of the two who had occasion to go aboard the Rattlesnake to say good-by, and on returning to the brigantine, whispered to Harry:

"She is going to come and stay at my father's house, by and by, until the captain has his house ready. He's awful rich, and General Elrington's going to sell his property for him."

To close the career of Captain Blood, as a privateersman, it is only necessary to say that Ned's statement covered all that followed, except that the marriage of Miss Alice Elrington to St. George Blood Howard was celebrated in the farm-house of General Preble—the "Brigadier" and General Elrington having become warm friends, notwithstanding the war then raging between England and America.

CHAPTER XXII.

HOME AGAIN!

JUST one month after the capture of the Rattlesnake, two youths in naval dress attracted considerable attention in the main street of Falmouth.

The Volunteer, under Captain Blood, had returned to the port of departure, and, the facts being laid before the authorities, the vessel and cargo were condemned, and the value divided among the crew.

The boys had just parted with Blood and Turner, it having been arranged that the boatswain should take care of the captain, for that night, while Ned was to play host to Frank.

Prize money had been plentiful, and, during the early morning, the captain and boatswain, as well as the boys, electrified the Falmouth shop-keepers by their heavy purchases.

A farmer's wagon passed, while the boys were standing hesitating as to what they do next, for, as he frankly admitted, Ned was not at all certain regarding the character of the welcome which would be accorded him by The Brigadier.

"I've something for every one of them, except him," said Ned, as the wagon passed, "but what to buy him puzzles me. What do you think I should get for him?"

"Potatoes!" laughingly answered Frank, pointing to the farmer's wagon.

Ned jumped at the suggestion, and, hailing the farmer, bargained for the delivery of the entire load at General Preble's farm-house.

"Now, I know what to get him!" exclaimed Ned, looking after the farmer's wagon, with a mischievous smile.

"Why, do you intend buying more?"

"More!" repeated Ned, "why I've only commenced. I'll put as much stores in the old farm-house, as if The Brigadier was going cruising in it."

"Come on!" he continued, laughing at Frank's astonishment; "come on! It will take up all the forenoon, and, then, we must spend an hour with Mrs. Turner."

Seizing Frank's arm, as he spoke, the now joyfully excited Ned hurried to a nearby provision dealer's, where barrels of pork, and beef, and barrels and sacks of flour, and potatoes, were purchased and ordered delivered to General Preble.

Nearly a dozen dealers were visited in this fashion before Ned was satisfied, for none of them carried a very heavy stock, and provisions were scarce.

About noon a wagon, loaded entirely with potatoes, stopped in front of the Preble farm-house, and the driver halloed:

"Where d'ye want these here 'taters put, Brigadier?"

The family were at dinner, and The Brigadier was just remarking that provisions of all kinds, and potatoes in particular, would be scarcer even than they were, owing to the war, and, with a grim smile, he went to the open doorway, and answered:

"I'd like first rate to put them in my barn, but it so happens that I haven't ordered any."

"Nor could I pay for them, if I had," he muttered to himself.

"Then into the barn they go!" returned the driver, adding:

"Whether you want 'em or not, I got the directions t' deliver 'em here, an' have got the money for doin' it, too!"

The Brigadier stared as the speaker turned his team toward the barn, where, a few minutes after, he began unloading the potatoes.

"Eben, go tell that fellow that somebody's been playing a trick on him. We want, or rather ordered, no potatoes," said The Brigadier, turning to his eldest son.

In a few minutes the latter returned from the barn, and, seeing that the work of unloading was still going on, the father impatiently asked:

"What's the matter with the fellow? Why don't he stop his foolish work?"

"He says he's willing to be tricked, at the same rate, every day; that the potatoes were bought, and paid for at a liberal price, by a young man in Falmouth, this morning, and that he received two dollars extra to deliver them here."

"And he says he's going to do it, if he has to fight," smilingly added Eben.

"Did he know the young man?" asked Mrs. Preble.

"No, but he says the stranger looked like a sailor."

"It is exactly one year since Edward left us," thoughtfully observed the mother.

Another wagon stopped in front of the door, at this juncture, shutting off further speculation regarding the stranger.

This time the driver came to the door, and, handing The Brigadier a receipted bill for a barrel each, of beef, pork and flour, and one sack of potatoes, asked:

"Where'll you have 'em put, sir?"

After staring a full minute at the bill, The Brigadier sighed, and, in a helpless way, answered:

"Anywhere, anywhere! Some of the boys will show you."

Before the second wagon was out of the way, a third arrived—loaded with the same kind, and quantity of goods, except that the potatoes were reduced to a half sack.

Then, as if timing their movements, a fourth, fifth, and sixth wagon stopped before the door, just as the previous one was ready to leave.

It was dark when the sixth wagon departed, and The Brigadier looked relieved, as he heard it roll away.

"Well, that's the last of 'em, I guess," he sighed, looking very much perplexed, and half angry.

He was mistaken, however, for, just as Mrs. Preble reproachfully answered that he should feel grateful instead of angry, a loud "whoa!" accompanied by the noise of horses' hoofs, announced the arrival of a seventh load!

This time it was a large farm wagon, and, in addition to the usual beef, pork, flour and potatoes, contained fully two dozen packages, each bearing the name of some member of the family.

"Anything for me?" asked The Brigadier, with a grim smile, seeing every one but himself busy opening their packages.

"Oh, yes!" assured the driver, as he relieved himself of another armful of packages, and extending a folded paper, continued:

"That's for you, sir. It's a receipted bill for what's on the wagon."

"What is on the wagon?" demanded The Brigadier, without looking at the bill.

The driver, unaware of his six predecessors, innocently began:

"A mighty fine lot of stuff, sir. Beef, pork—"

"Flour, and potatoes!" angrily interrupted The Brigadier, amid a burst of laughter, which not even his severity could restrain, and in which he himself soon joined.

"Why, man, I've been doing nothing but receiving beef, pork, flour, and potatoes, all this blessed day!" he exclaimed, on recovering his composure.

"You're a mighty lucky man, sir—in these times," gravely returned the driver, adding:

"I wish I had a son to do the same for me."

Although able to learn nothing definite from any of the previous teamsters, this, now, was not much of a surprise, for the arrival of the packages, which contained just what each had desired for years, had led all to suspect that Ned was the donor.

"Where is he? Where is my boy?" eagerly asked, Mrs. Preble.

"Right here, mother!" came the cheery response from the open doorway, and, a moment after, Ned was locked in his mother's arms.

Following the excited boy, came Horton, and it was to the latter that The Brigadier, and the rest of the family, were compelled to address their questions, and remarks, for the next few minutes.

When, quiet being somewhat restored, Ned had told the story of his life for the past year, The Brigadier laid the seven bills for beef, pork, flour, and potatoes, on the table, and asked, significantly:

"And these?"

"Oh, I didn't stop to dig the potatoes, so I thought it would be wise to buy some before coming home," laughed Ned, adding, very soberly:

"I've prayed, many a time, for another chance to dig some!"

"Then, you've had enough of the sea?" asked The Brigadier.

"Yes, sir;—in that way," declared Ned. "Now, I want to get an appointment as midshipman, and one for Frank."

"Well, we'll see about it, though, since you are determined to follow that life, I may as well begin at once."

"Thank you, sir. Of course, Frank is included?"

"Oh, yes; but you are a foolish boy!" insisted The Brigadier, little dreaming how high that boy's name would one day stand among the list of American commodores.

The Brigadier "saw about" the matter so quickly, and energetically, that, one month after their arrival in Falmouth, the boys were appointed to the 36 gun ship Protector, where we will leave them.

THE END.

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